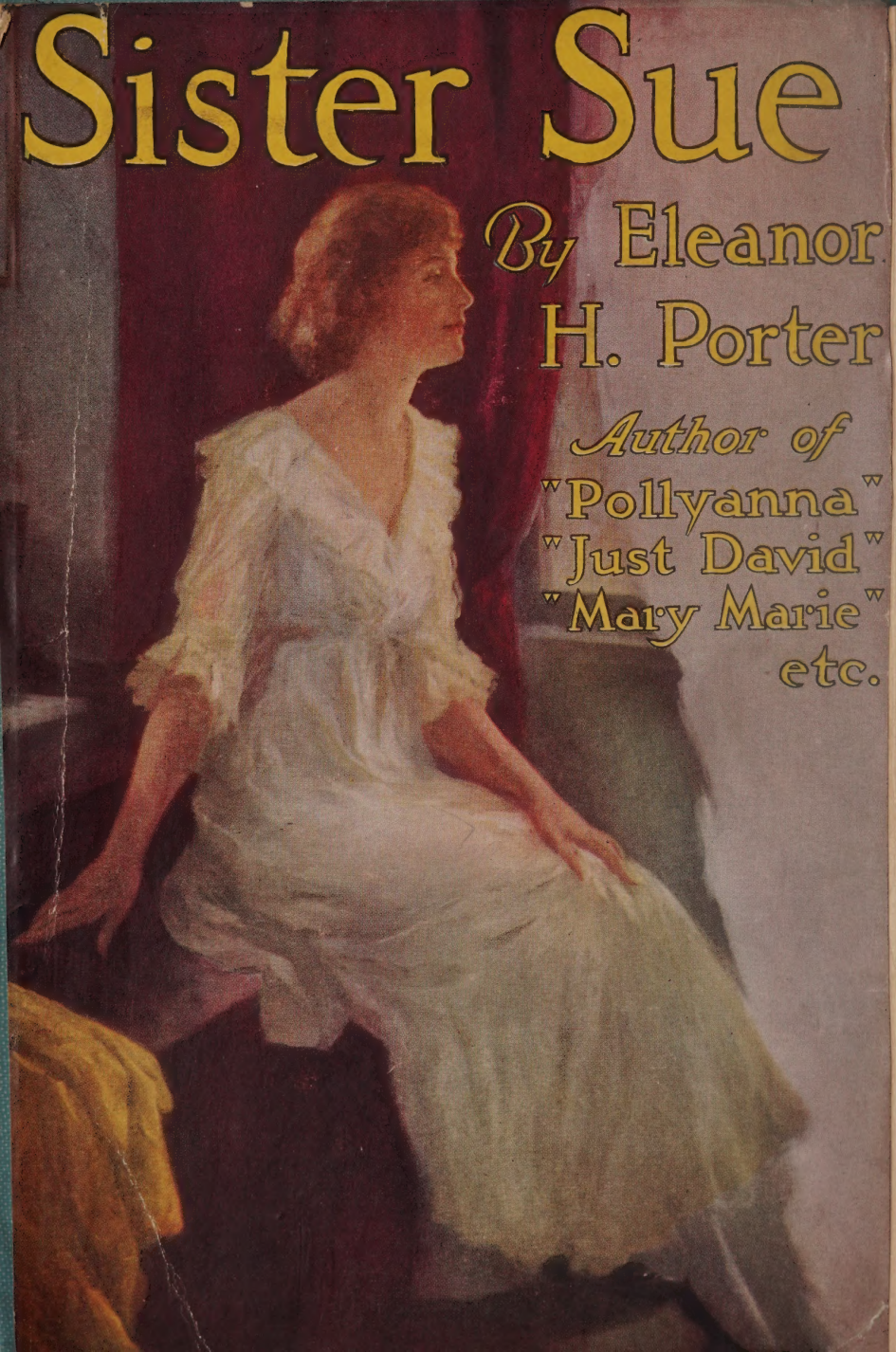
SISTER SUE

ELEANOR H. PORTER

Sister Sue



By Eleanor H. Porter

Author of
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etc.

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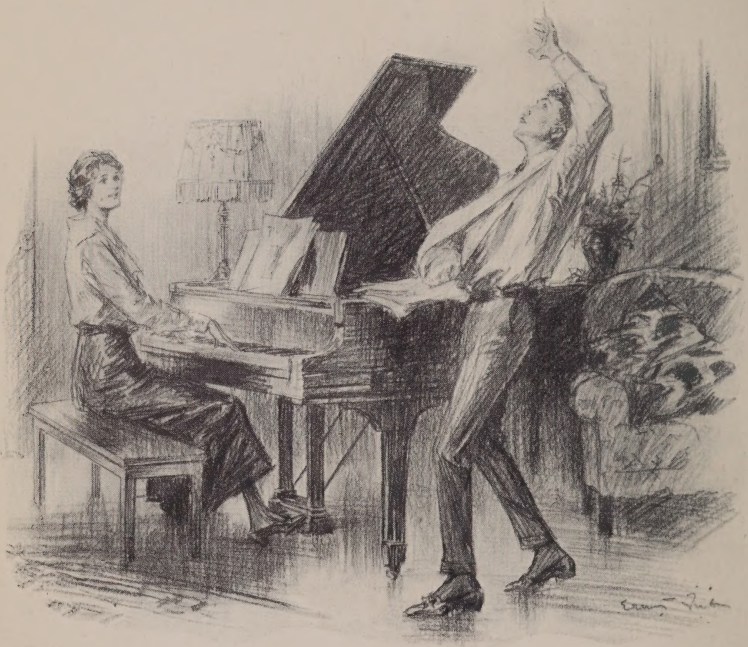
HE ROARED — AND SCOLDED — AND SNAPPED — AND SNARLED

(*page* 252)

SISTER SUE

BY

ELEANOR H. PORTER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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To the innumerable

SISTER SUES

All over the world — who, patient and uncomplaining, have lived their "barren" lives with the "life worth while" ever beckoning them from afar, and especially

to certain very dear "Sister Sues"

personally known to me but whose modesty forbids my mentioning them here by name

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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SISTER SUE

CHAPTER I

THE PETTY DETAILS

"Ask your sister Sue. She'll know."

Sister Sue herself, hurrying through the hall, heard her father's voice in the library. He was speaking, she suspected, to her sister May; though it might be, of course, to her brother Gordon. In either case it would be the same — some petty detail of daily living that was to be referred to her; and Sister Sue did not want some petty detail of daily living referred to her — just now.

She was tired and sick of petty details of daily living. They were so petty, so small, so insignificant, so trivial! As if there were no one else in the house who could tell whether or not May should wear her rubbers, or where Gordon's baseball bat was! But there did not seem to be. "Ask your sister Sue." If she heard it once, she heard it a dozen times a day — or, rather, she might have heard it, if she had chanced to be near, as she was to-day.

With a quick look over her shoulder toward the library door, and a hastening of her step up the thickly padded stairway, she sped along the upper hall to an open door halfway down the wide passageway. She

paused, but only for an instant. The next moment she had darted across the hall, opened another door, and shut it quickly behind her.

She drew a long breath, her back hard-pressed against the door.

For a minute — for one little minute — she was free. She *would* be free! And she was going to be free, too! As if all her life, all her glorious life, she was to be tied to her sister's rubbers and her brother's baseball bat! Indeed, no! Had not that very day Signor Bartoni said — ?

With an ecstatic little indrawn breath she drew her hands together across her breast in a rapturous self-embrace. Once again in her ears rang the music-master's enthusiastic commendation and the generous applause of her classmate audience. Once again before her eyes rose the vision of countless other audiences-to-be, with herself bowing her thanks to their clamorous demands of "Encore! Encore!" Once again through her whole self tingled the ecstasy of interpreting to a listening multitude the master thoughts of a master mind until the ivory keys under her fingers seemed living voices to speak her message as she willed.

And she could do it. She knew she could do it. Had not Signor Bartoni said that never before had a pupil of his played that concerto with such beauty of tone and perfection of execution, such fire, yet with such poise and precision, as she had played it that afternoon? Had he not told her, after the concert was over, that it would be a "pi-tee" and a "cr-rime" not to

give to the world the benefit of her great talent? She must become the great "artiste."

"The great artiste!" With another little thrill of ecstasy she hugged the name to herself.

"Sue! Sister Sue!" It was May's voice calling up the stairway.

With a quiver that was not a thrill of ecstasy the girl behind the closed door stiffened, her chin up, her breath suspended.

"Sue! Sue! Where are you?" The voice was nearer now, and carried a note of impatience. Behind the door Sister Sue's chin lifted with her breath the fraction of an inch. "Sue — Sue!" How tired she was of that eternal "Sue — Sue!" It would be Susanna on the programmes — Susanna Gilmore.

She was giving herself another little ecstatic hug when from the hall just the other side of the door came May's voice again.

"Sue! Sue! Why, where are you?" Then, half under her breath, in the voice of a hurt, disappointed child: "Why, I *thought* I saw you come in!"

Out in the hall the footsteps had plainly come to a pause at the open door opposite which led to Sister Sue's bedroom. The voice called again "Sue — Sue!"

Across the face of the girl behind the door swept a look of worried distress.

"Sue — Sue! Sister Sue!" The steps were hurrying down the hall now toward the stairway that led to the third floor. "Are you up there?"

Sister Sue turned, her hand outstretched toward the doorknob. Then, irresolutely, she drew it back.

Outside, the steps came hurrying by the door again, and on down the stairway to the floor below. From there, faintly, came the insistent voice again, questioning a maid in the hallway, calling to Gordon in the den, complaining to the master of the house in the library that Sister Sue was n't anywhere — not anywhere — yet she surely came in not ten minutes ago. And now where was she?

Where was she, indeed! Up in the blue-room guest-chamber, pacing back and forth, back and forth, now stopping with her breath suspended to listen to the questioning voice downstairs, now resuming her march with a gesture of joyous abandonment to the inner voices of "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore! Encore!"

But it was not for long. Anybody who knew Sister Sue would know that it would not be for long. With a little shrug and a resigned upflinging of her two hands, Sister Sue softly opened the door, slipped out into the hall, and walked toward the stairway.

After all, it did n't matter, it did n't really matter. It was n't as if she were n't *going* to be free!

In the lower hall the two sisters came face to face.

"Why, Sue, where have you been? I've looked everywhere for you!"

Sister Sue laughed lightly.

"Not everywhere — because you did n't look where I was."

"But where were you?"

"In the land of nowhere, anywhere — in the land of maybe," chuckled Sister Sue. Then, with a sudden

stiffening of her whole slender self, she amended: "No, not *may*-be. In the land of *will*-be! I was lost in the land of *will*-be, my dear sister. Ever been there?"

"Sue, of course not! Nor you, either. What do you mean? What a case you are, Sue Gilmore, when you get started! But, listen. I wanted you. Beth Henderson wants me to motor over to the Club for dinner. Phil Chandler and Bert Hammond are going. Oh, Mrs. Henderson is going, too, of course," she added hastily, in response to the dawning refusal on her sister's face.

"But, May, dear, you know I don't like —" began Sister Sue doubtfully, only to break off with: "What does your father say?"

"Says to ask you, of course. He always says that, you know he does. And, Sue, you will let me go, won't you?"

"But, May, you know I don't like to have you with Bert —"

"But I'm not going to be with him. I'm going to be with Beth and her mother. And it'll just spoil everything if I can't go. They said it would — Beth and Mrs. Henderson. Sue, *please!*"

Still Sue hesitated.

"Of course, if Mrs. Henderson is going," she began frowningly.

The other did not wait for her to finish. With a bearlike hug and a rapturous kiss she effectually snapped the sentence off short.

"Oh, Sue, you're a duck! I knew you would! I'll

go tell them right away that I can." And with a whirl of silken skirts she was off to the telephone.

Behind her, Sister Sue still frowned.

"Yes, she knew I would. That's exactly it — *she knew I would,*" sighed Sister Sue to herself. "I always do."

"Oh, Sis, are you there?" It was Gordon calling from the little den at the right of the stairway.

"Yes, I'm here. Well, Gordon, what can I do for *you?*" Was there an ironic sweetness in the voice as the questioner crossed the threshold of the den? Perhaps. Yet if there was, it apparently passed quite over the blond head of the good-looking youth lolling back in the morris chair. He blew a smoke-ring before he answered.

"Lots. Sis, you're a peach!"

"Of course! Well, what is it?"

He twisted in his chair, and threw a quick glance into her face. Even Gordon could not fail to notice the ironic sweetness this time.

"Now, Sis, you've no need to speak nor look like that. I guess I feel as bad as you do."

"But what is it? And — Gordon — that cigarette!"

He stirred again restlessly.

"Yes, I know. But, it's the first to-day — honest! And I had to have *something.* You see — I — I'm up against it again. That's all."

"Oh, Gordon, not that! Not so soon — over your allowance," cried the girl, dropping herself helplessly into the chair nearest the door.

"But, Sue, you *know* how mean and small it is?"

"To go in debt — yes," interpolated the girl.

The youth's chin came up with a dignity as haughty as the recumbency of his position would allow.

"I was referring to the allowance," he vouchsafed coldly.

Unexpectedly Sister Sue laughed.

"Oh, Gordon, Gordon, what a boy you are! I can't stay vexed with you, and you know it. But really, dear, it *is* serious. I know it is n't large, but it's quite large enough for a boy of sixteen. Now how much — do you owe?"

The youth drew a long breath and came energetically erect.

"There, that's the stuff! Now we can get somewhere. Well, I owe Ted a couple of dollars, and Harry Prescott five, and Bert Hammond —"

"Hammond! Gordon, you don't owe *him!*"

"Not much. Only four or five dollars, and —"

"Four or five dollars!" groaned the girl; then, sharply, she began to speak with stern decision.

"Gordon, this thing has got to stop! I will not have you owing money to those boys."

"There, that's the stuff! That's it exactly," cried the boy triumphantly. "I knew you would n't want me to owe them like this. That's why I told you. I *knew* you'd help me pay them back — go to Dad, you know, and explain. Dad'll do anything for you. You know he will."

She shook her head slowly.

"Gordon, this is not going to do. You've got to go to Father yourself this time."

The young fellow paled visibly.

"Sister Sue, you never would! You would n't! You would n't desert a fellow like this! You know what I'd get."

"I know what you would n't get. You would n't get the money."

"That 's just it — that's just it!" he cried feverishly. "And if I can't get the money I can't pay back the boys; and then I'll still be owing them. Don't you see? Bert Hammond and the rest."

A swift spasm of abhorrence crossed her face. Very plainly she did "see."

"And so I know you'll do it, Sister Sue," he urged, following up his advantage. "I know you'll do it!"

There was no answer. Motionless she sat, looking fixedly straight ahead at nothing. After a long minute she sighed and rose to her feet.

"Oh, yes, she'll do it. Sister Sue will do it," she said a bit grimly. At the door she turned.

"Gordon, you must understand. I'll do it this time, but not again — *not again.*"

"There ain't a-goin' ter be no 'again,'" retorted Gordon, with all his old debonair confidence. "Say, Sister Sue, you *are* a brick!"

But Sister Sue was already halfway down the hall.

At the library door she paused. Almost always she paused at that library door. There was something about the fine old room with its paneled walls, beamed ceiling, and crimson draperies that brought a little

catch to Sue's breath — it was so beautiful, so altogether satisfying. Nowhere in the house was there a room she loved half so well.

But it was not the enchantment of soft lights and blended colors that brought her feet to a pause to-day — though even her worried distress over her present mission did not blind her eyes to the charm of a bit of tooling that flashed gold in the slant rays of the sun across the room. It was the perturbed consciousness that she was coming all unprepared to the task before her, and that her own strong disapproval of young Gordon's conduct was a poor foundation upon which to erect a plea for mercy that would be in the least convincing.

Across the room her father sat in his favorite chair reading. She knew exactly just how resignedly he would lay aside his book, just how impatiently he would pull at his little pointed beard, just how nervously he would tap the toe of his expensively shod foot, while she was telling him her story; and just how irritably he would demand, when she had finished:

"Well — well — well! — what can *I* do? Why do you come to me? Can't *you* tell him that he must take the consequences of his own act?"

She knew it all. However, it must be done, of course. And with a sigh she entered the room.

"Father, I —"

At the sound of her voice the man sitting by the window turned with a quick exclamation.

"There! So you're here at last, Sue. They've been looking for you — both of them. Katy wanted you,

too. And, by the way, I wanted you myself. I wanted to tell you to speak to Katy. My toast again this morning — it was burned. And my steak — can't you make her stop sending it to the table dried into a piece of tough leather? If you'd been down to breakfast yourself this morning —"

"Yes, yes, I know, Father. I'm sorry," explained the girl hurriedly. "I had mine early, and did n't wait for you. I was going to the conservatory. But I'm sorry about the steak and the toast. I — I'll speak to Katy. But, first, I want to say —"

"And while you are about it," interrupted the man, "I wish you'd speak to Mary about the sheets on my bed. She does n't tuck them in at all. They pull out every night. Thank you, my dear. I knew you'd attend to it," he finished, turning back to his book.

Irresolutely the girl opened her lips. Then, with a little shrug of her shoulders, she faced about.

"I'll go and speak to Katy and Mary right away," she said, aloud. To herself she sighed, as she left the room: "It's no use *now* for the other. I'll have to wait — for that."

Downstairs she spoke to Katy about the toast that was burned and the beefsteak that was like tough leather. She spoke also to Mary about the sheets that would not stay tucked. But before she could say to either what was on her own mind, both had spoken to her. Katy said the laundress had not come, and what should she do. Mary said that there was no more toilet soap in the house, and where should she get some.

It was not until after dinner that Sister Sue found a few moments quite to herself. Her father, after a somewhat stormy interview and a grudging consent to leniency as to his son Gordon's misdemeanor, was dozing over the evening paper. Gordon was out with some of his friends. May had gone on the motor ride. Katy and Mary were busy with their own affairs.

With a sigh of content Sister Sue dropped herself on to the couch in the living-room and gave herself up to blissful reveries.

After all, it did n't matter — not really matter — all those tiresome details of soap and laundress, motor parties and overrun allowances. It was n't as if it was to continue always — as if she had nothing else all her life to look forward to. Heaven knew she had had no small amount of it in the past. Not but that she had been glad to do everything she could, of course. Only it had been Sister Sue, Sister Sue, Sister Sue, for *everything*, all her life, especially since the little mother had died six years before; and sometimes it did seem as if —

Like a panorama the years of her childhood and girlhood unrolled before her.

She had been fourteen when her mother had died. May had been twelve, and Gordon ten. But even before that, she had seemed to have no will or way of her own. Always it had been: "Yes, May, your sister Sue will give it to you"; or, "Yes, Gordon, your sister Sue will do it for you." And Sister Sue had found herself acquiescing, whether it were to give up the larger apple or to untie an obstinate shoestring.

Ever since she could remember, it had been like that. Sister Sue was the eldest. Sister Sue would give up, of course. And Sister Sue had given up.

Then the little mother had died. That was six years ago. More than ever, after that, had Sister Sue "given up." It seemed to her, as she thought of it now, that for the last six years she had done nothing but give up. Never was it what *she* wanted. It was what May wanted, or Gordon wanted, or Father wanted, or even what Katy and Mary in the kitchen wanted! *Her* time, *her* thoughts, *her* wishes — they had been as nothing compared to the time, thoughts, and wishes of everybody else in the house. Why, it had got so that they all thought nobody could do anything for them but Sister Sue. They had just got into the habit of thinking that Sister Sue must do everything. Even outside, among their friends, she was known as "Sister Sue," and was often called so.

And it was not right. It was a shame. Was she never to have a chance to live her own life? Why, here she was twenty years old! If ever she was going to do big things, real things, worth-while things that counted, she must be about it. And Signor Bartoni had said that she could do them. He had said that her talent was wonderful; that it would be a "pi-tee" and a "cr-rime" not to give it to the world. What would he say if he knew that that wonderful talent was tied to a missing cake of soap or a laundress that did not come? Would he not call that a "pi-tee" and a "cr-rime"?

And it was a pity, and it was a crime. And it had

got to stop. Not but that she loved them — her father, May, Gordon. She loved them dearly. She loved them so well that sometimes she felt almost ashamed that she should fret and fume under their constant demands upon her. But she could love them still, just as well, and yet be free. She could love them better even, perhaps. For would she not meanwhile be doing something to make them proud of her? Would she not be doing something that would be a real credit to them?

And it was not as if they really needed her. Some one else could see that May wore her rubbers and that the soap was bought. There was Cousin Abby. For years now she had almost begged to come. Cousin Abby was forty, a widow alone in the world, and poor; and she knew all about rubbers, and soap, and such things. And she *wanted* to come. To be sure, they had thought that they did not want Cousin Abby (her father, May, and Gordon); but that was just because they preferred to let Sister Sue do it. They always preferred to let Sister Sue do everything. It never seemed to enter their heads that it was just possible Sister Sue might prefer to do something else, sometimes.

But they would understand — she was sure they would understand when she told them. And they would be pleased and proud and glad when they knew what Signor Bartoni had said. They would be willing to have Cousin Abby then. She knew they would.

And there was Martin Kent. She was not so sure of Martin. He might not be so pleased. He did not care

much for music. Besides, the only way she could please him was to say she would marry him right away. And she did not want to do that. Marry him right away, indeed! Why, that would be but more of the same thing she had been having — merely a change in the name of the laundress and in the label on the cake of soap. That was all. Not but that she expected to be married sometime, of course. By and by, after she had become the great artiste, and had made them all proud of her — time enough then to get married. There was no hurry.

She would have to study, of course. Oh, how she would have to study and practice! But she would not mind that. She would love it. And she need not worry about the money for the lessons. Luckily there had always been plenty of money. Besides, after a little she would be earning something herself. She would rather like that, she believed. It must give one such an independent feeling!

It only remained then to tell them — her father, May, Gordon, and Martin — tell them the wonderful future in store for her, the supreme glory she was going to bring to the name of Gilmore when she should have become the great artiste.

CHAPTER II

ALL FOR LOVE

It was some days before Sister Sue found the opportunity of telling her family. She wanted them all together when she told them, and there seemed to be no appropriate time when they were all together. Besides, of late, her father had appeared to be more than usually nervous and irritable, for some unexplained reason; and she never liked to tell him disturbing things when he was in an unresponsive mood. And he certainly was in that sort of mood now. He seemed to be worried or anxious over something. It might be business. She rather suspected that it was.

She could not even tell Martin. As it happened, Martin was away for a week. There was nothing to do, therefore, but to wait. And as patiently as she could Sister Sue set herself to this new task, daily comforting herself with "Oh, well, it is n't as if it was n't going to come sometime!"

Then, almost as a surprise, the night before Martin Kent's expected arrival, came her chance: a furious storm was raging outside, and the Gilmore family were all together in the library.

For five minutes Sister Sue looked a little fearfully into the faces of her assembled family; then, taking her courage in both hands, she spoke.

She told them first of what Signor Bartoni had said. She enlarged upon the wonder of such praise

from such a source, and she let them see plainly how much it meant to her. She told them then of her determination: she was to fit herself for a concert pianist. She was to try to prove herself worthy of Signor Bartoni's high commendation. She was going to make of herself something really worth while.

With a little breathless choke in her voice she stopped. Some way it sounded to her very crude, very commonplace, now that she had said it. She had intended to say much more. She had hoped to bring to their eyes the wondrous vision of herself bowing to enthralled multitudes, and to their ears the intoxicating clamor of "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore!" But she knew that she had done very far from that.

She felt suddenly shy and embarrassed. She was tempted almost to run away upstairs to her room. Though she realized at once that she could not do that, of course. There was yet more that she must say — much more. She had not yet spoken at all of Cousin Abby. With that little breathless choke, therefore, she waited now for some sort of reply to what she had already said.

There was a blank half-minute of silence that seemed to Sister Sue an eternity. Then from her father came this:

"You mean you are going to turn yourself into a — a show girl on the stage?"

The tension snapped, and Sister Sue laughed a bit hysterically.

"Not exactly *that*, Father — not in pink tights and spangles," she twinkled; then in a very different

voice, just above her breath, she stammered: "I'm going to be a — great artiste." It was out, with all the hushed awe and glorified elation of youth's ambition.

There was another benumbed silence; then May began doubtfully:

"But do you think you will *like* that — on the stage so?"

"Of course she'll like it!" cut in Gordon, with sudden vehemence. "And I, for one, say, 'Bully for you, Sis!' We're going to be proud of you."

"Thank you, Gordon." Sister Sue's eyes glistened. "Of course I *hope* you will, but we can't tell about that — yet; but I'm going to try, oh, you don't know how I'm going to study and practice and *work*." She said this looking straight into Gordon's boyishly sympathetic eyes. Then, with a little relieved sigh, she turned to the others. "And so I'll write to Cousin Abby right away, and see how soon she'll come," she finished.

It was like a match to gunpowder.

"Cousin Abby!" ejaculated three amazed, angry voices. Then her father demanded: "Come here? What do you mean?"

The amazed anger of those three voices had not been lost on Sister Sue; but she gave no sign that she understood its meaning.

"Why, come here to live, of course — to see to things, you know," she retorted cheerily.

"Nonsense!" ejaculated her father.

"But we don't want Cousin Abby here!" cried May.

"I guess *not!*" emphasized Gordon.

"But you'll *have* to have her," reasoned Sister Sue. She still spoke cheerily, though her voice had lost some of its assurance. "You'll have to have some one, and I should think she would be the best of anybody."

"But we don't want any one but you," spoke up May.

"We don't need any one," declared Gordon.

"Come, come," interposed the father sharply; "there is no need of going through all this again. We settled it once for all some time ago. We don't want Cousin Abby nor need her. What is more, we're not going to have her. We're doing very well as we are, Sue. Now let us hear no more about it."

"That's just it. We don't want any one but our Sister Sue," beamed Gordon, settling back in his chair as at the satisfactory conclusion of a somewhat troublesome matter.

Sister Sue wet her lips, but her voice, as she spoke, still carried a resolute cheeriness.

"Oh, but you don't understand. I shan't be here, you see."

Her three auditors sat suddenly erect.

"You won't be here! What do you mean?" demanded her father.

"Why, I told you. I'm going to study. I've got to go away. I'm going to New York first, then I want to go abroad."

"Nonsense!" cried the man, with an impatient gesture.

"Why, Sister Sue, you can't go away!" expostulated May. "Who'll keep house for us?"

"Cousin Abby. That's what I'm telling you."

It came then — the storm of protest. They understood at last. They were not only indignant and angry, but they were amazed and grieved. Not have Sister Sue at home with them? Why, it was absurd, unthinkable! Why, they'd always had Sister Sue. They should n't think she'd *wish* to go — *anywhere*, when they wanted her so at home!

Sister Sue wet her lips once more, and began all over again at the beginning. She tried to make them see what it meant to her — what Signor Bartoni had said; how her whole future happiness was bound up in this great wish of hers; how this was her one chance to make something really worth while of her life.

In the end she won a grudging consent — that is, if it might be called consent. Her father, with a frown and an impatient gesture, sprang to his feet, muttering as he left the room: "Oh, well, well, have it your own way. I've too many troubles of my own to think of to try to settle yours."

Gordon, with no sympathy in his eyes now, and no "Bully for you!" on his lips, struck a match with unnecessary vehemence. "Of course, have it your own way!" he snapped, as he, too, rose to his feet and left the room.

Wistful-eyed and quivering-lipped, Susanna Gilmore turned to her sister.

"May, *you* think —" she began. But May interrupted her sharply, as she, also, rose to her feet.

"It 's just as well, perhaps, that I do not say what I think," she vouchsafed coldly.

The next moment Sister Sue was alone.

For a long time she sat motionless, her eyes on the dancing flames on the hearth; then, as if to a refuge, she flew to the piano in the music-room. In fifteen minutes she came away, rested, refreshed, serene, and at peace once more with the world.

It was always like that with Sister Sue. Let her have but ten minutes of improvising at the piano, and whether it was joy, sorrow, anger, or a fearsome questioning that had strained her emotions to the breaking point, those ten minutes of vibrant fellowship with the ivory keys had brought back her poise and serenity of soul. Sister Sue's family irreverently called it "taking it out on the piano." And it was always left for Gordon to add with a roguish twinkle that they were mighty glad the piano was there, just the same!

Sister Sue wrote to Cousin Abby that evening. To herself she said she wanted to do it before she lost her courage, and before they — her family — lost theirs. The letter written, she went to bed, but not to sleep. For long hours she lay awake, half the time assuring herself over and over that she was *not* an unfeeling, selfish wretch, unfilial and unsisterly, to want to live her own life; the other half spent in trying to plan what she should say to Martin Kent.

Martin would not like it, of course. She was quite sure of that. He would much prefer that she should tell him she had decided to set an early marriage date.

But she had already told him that she should not do that. As if she were going to tie herself down at twenty years of age to what would be merely another laundress and another brand of soap! After she had made a name for herself — that would be a different matter.

So Martin would not be exactly pleased with what she was going to tell him. She knew that. But he would not be like her father, or Gordon, or even May. She was sure of that. He would show interest and sympathy, and be proud and excited and glad when she told him what Signor Bartoni had said. He always praised her playing, and said he thought she had wonderful talent. So he would understand and not object — not really object — to her wanting to make the most of that talent, she was sure.

Sister Sue went to sleep then. In her ears once more was ringing the applause of uncounted audiences, and in her eyes was the vision of herself bowing her thanks to the clamorous "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!"

Martin Kent called the next evening.

Martin Kent was engaged in writing the Great American Novel. That is, he said it was going to be that when it was finished. He had told Sue several times that it was going to be by far the best thing he had ever done.

Martin Kent already had several novels to his credit — or discredit, as one chose to look at it. They were more or less erratic, and they had not sold well — not that this disturbed their author, however. Martin Kent snapped his fingers at the public taste,

with a disdainful "Who cares?" and a merry "I should worry!" To be sure, there were those who wondered why he did not worry, for certainly his visible means of support were very slender. He was known to have only a small annuity aside from what his books brought him. Others — one of whom was Gordon Gilmore — said that they understood quite well why he did not worry: he did n't need to if he was going to marry Susanna Gilmore! — which was a most unkind insinuation to make, especially concerning one who was at that very moment engaged in writing that Great American Novel which would, of course, sell away into the hundreds of thousands. But perhaps Gordon and some others had not quite so much faith in this Great American Novel.

Sue Gilmore had faith in it; so, too, had her young sister May. May was particularly interested: was not she herself writing stories also — or trying to? Was not *she* going to write the Great American Novel sometime? Of course she was! May just *knew* this novel of Martin Kent's was going to be a wonderful success! May did not realize, perhaps, to what extent that confidence on her part had to do with the author's black eyes, ready smile, and debonair self generally. May regarded her future brother-in-law as the most thrillingly handsome man she had even seen — and May's experience was not limited. She was familiar with the features of nearly every Adonis of the screen and the footlights. As for John Gilmore — John Gilmore was not a movie fan, neither was he thrilled at the sight of Adonises in

everyday life. He knew little of the Great American Novel, and he cared less. He knew little of Martin Kent — and perhaps he cared less also. That the young author had once said something to him about wanting to marry his daughter, Susanna, he remembered perfectly. (He had answered: "Well, well, what do I know about it? Ask your sister —" then he had caught himself just in time and finished — "Ask the young lady herself, sir." He remembered that.) He knew now, too, that there was some sort of an "understanding" between the two young people. But the fact never loomed large in his thoughts, and carried only a vague consciousness of something that was possibly to happen in the dim and distant future.

To-night, when Martin Kent called, Sister Sue was alone in the living-room. John Gilmore was closeted in the library with two men who had come on business soon after dinner; and May and Gordon were off for the evening. Sister Sue was glad that there was a prospect of having the room quite to themselves. She had much that she wanted to say to Martin Kent; and she did not want to be interrupted. She knew, too, that first she must listen to what Martin Kent himself had to say of his own doings. Martin Kent always spoke first and listened afterwards. Not but that he was entertaining — Martin Kent was always a good talker. It was just that it was his way to start in with a full account of his own affairs first, as if they were the most interesting of any subject that could be broached. For that matter, they were, many times. Martin Kent was always having unusual experiences.

To-night he had been away a week "getting atmosphere," he said, for his novel. He had spent the entire time in a little Vermont town in the Green Mountains, and he had many stories to tell of the splendid "copy" he had found there. Then he spoke of the story itself.

"And it's going to be the very best thing I ever did," he cried, his face alight.

"I'm glad. And — and you look very happy, Martin," the girl said a little wistfully.

"I am happy. Who would n't be happy? Are n't we always happy when we know we are doing our very best?"

It was Sue's chance, and she grasped it.

"That's it — that's it, exactly," she interposed a little feverishly; "and that's why I want to do *my* best."

The man laughed lightly.

"And so you do, my dear; you always do your best."

Impatiently she brushed this aside.

"No, no, you don't understand. I mean I want to do my best — in my music."

"And so you do, I say."

"But I want to do better!"

"All right! That's a laudable wish, I'm sure," he bantered.

Impatiently again she brushed his words aside. And then she told him — hurriedly, impetuously, with little half-finished sentences that were eloquent of suppressed fear and longing. And when she had

finished she sat back palpitatingly, her eager eyes on Martin Kent's face. She was so sure Martin Kent *would* understand and sympathize! And yet —

And Martin Kent understood — but he did not sympathize. He laughed first, and called the idea silly and absurd, and he asked why in the world, with her money, she should care to take up a thing like that. When he found her still unmoved he became stern and dignified, and grieved; and he reproached her bitterly that she should prefer a public career to a life of peace and love under his sheltering care.

"But, Martin, I have n't said that I would n't marry you sometime," she argued, in response to this. "I've just told you; I want first to try my wings. I want to do something really worth while. I want to make you all proud of me. I've got it in me! I *know* I've got it in me, to make people see what I see and hear what I hear when I play. Oh, Martin, don't you see?"

"I see — that you don't love me," said Martin Kent passionately.

He tried pleading then. With all his emotional power and his command of words, he appealed to her heart and to her sympathies. He pictured her life, barren and wasted, without love. He pictured his own work, come to naught, a failure, because of the lack of her love and her presence as an incentive. He pictured themselves grown old with love and youth lost forever. As he drew it, it was a picture calculated to strike cold terror to the stoutest heart.

Sister Sue, caught up in the whirlwind of his woo-

ing, was lifted to an exaltation of surrender and self-sacrifice that saw only love and the world well lost. And Martin Kent went away that evening with her promise to marry him in July.

"I never dreamed he cared so much for me," she sighed, as she settled herself to sleep that night. "And it *is* nice to be loved like that; and of course such love really is the greatest thing in the world!"

Just as she was dozing off, another thought came.

"I suppose I shan't need Cousin Abby — now. He said I could live right along here just the same after we were married. But — oh, well, if she comes, let her come. I shan't mind. It'll take some care away from me; and I shall want more time to myself when I'm married, anyway," she murmured happily.

CHAPTER III

COUSIN ABBY

Sister Sue was still on the heights of self-surrender and exalted sacrifice the next morning. It was still all for love and the world well lost, with her. But she decided not to tell her family of the change in her plans until Cousin Abby's letter should have arrived, settling beyond doubt whether or not Cousin Abby herself was coming.

She had not long to wait. Cousin Abby's reply came promptly, almost by return mail. Cousin Abby would be delighted to come. She was not only glad to be of service to them, but she was pleased, she was sure, that dear Susanna was going to improve her wonderful talent and make a great name for herself. She could come now, any time; just as soon as they wanted her. And she signed herself devotedly theirs, Cousin Abby Herford.

Sister Sue winced a little and bit her lip over the "wonderful talent" and the "great name." But instantly she scornfully asked herself what was a wonderful talent or a great name compared to love — real love? True, at the same time she put both her hands to her ears as if to shut out an insistent something that was clamoring to be heard. And she hurried very fast to tell her family that she had given up her career, and that she and Martin Kent were going to be married in July.

Sister Sue did not wait to tell her family all at once to-day. She took them as she found them, one or two at a time; and she gave her information hurriedly, almost feverishly, with little catches of her breath in her throat.

Their manner of receiving it was characteristic in each case.

Her sister May clasped her hands to her breast and drew an ecstatic sigh with her gaze on the ceiling as she cried: "Oh, Sister Sue, how perfectly lovely! And you'll have a church wedding, of course, and I'll be maid of honor! What shall I wear? Oh, you lucky girl! I think Martin Kent is positively the handsomest man I ever saw, and so do all the girls. They're simply crazy over him! Sue, Sister Sue, what *shall* I wear?" But Sister Sue was already halfway down the stairway: Gordon's clear whistle of the latest bit of ragtime had sounded from the hall below.

Gordon received the news of Sister Sue's coming marriage with a smile and a shrug.

"I expected as much. All right, Sis, I wish you joy. He's a lucky dog all right, all right!"

It was two days before Sister Sue found a chance to tell her father. When he was not away, or at the telephone, or closeted with some man in the library, he was so irritable and so obviously concerned with his own affairs, that she did not like to broach the subject. And when she did tell him she had to repeat her words before she penetrated his absorbed absentmindedness. Even then she elicited only an abstracted

"Yes, yes; well, I'm glad, I'm sure," as he got up to go into the library.

It was left for Gordon to precipitate matters by saying that same night at the dinner table:

"Oh, by the way, Sister Sue, of course Cousin Abby is n't coming now, I take it."

"But she is," smiled the girl. "I've had a letter, and she'll come at any time, and be glad to."

"You bet she would!" Gordon was still smiling. "But of course she won't have to, now. We don't need her."

"No, of course not," interposed May; "for of course you'll live here, Sue. You *said* you were going to."

"You bet she 's going to live here," cut in Gordon with a sly laugh.

"Certainly I'm going to live here." Sister Sue's chin had lifted a little. Her eyes were meeting Gordon's challenging glance with a flash of vague annoyance. "Martin said he would n't think of taking me away."

"You bet he would n't!" chuckled Gordon, again mischievously. But when his sister's eyes flashed another questioning glance of annoyance toward him, he shrugged his shoulders and repeated: "Oh, well, we don't need Cousin Abby now, anyway."

"But I've just told you she is coming," declared Sister Sue, with some spirit. "We asked her, and she's accepted. We've got to have her. Besides, I want her. There's all the shopping and the dressmaking, and I shall want some time to myself after I'm married; and —"

"Will you have the bridesmaids wear pink or blue?" interrupted May eagerly.

"Oh, you *women!*" cried Gordon disgustedly, with the blasé air of a man of forty. Then, appealingly to his father: "Dad, say something, can't you? We don't need Cousin Abby here, do we? Do we, Dad?" he repeated, as his father still continued to gaze abstractedly at the empty plate before him.

"Eh? What? Cousin Abby? Need her? How should I know?" he frowned irritably. "Ask your sister Sue. I — I've got other things to think of," he finished as he pushed back his chair and rose to his feet.

"But, Father, there's the dessert! You're not waiting for dessert," cried his elder daughter.

"Don't want any. Had enough — too much," tossed the man over his shoulder as he disappeared through the doorway.

At the table the three young people exchanged glances. Dessert and coffee on the table, and the waitress out of the room, May spoke.

"For pity's sake, what's the matter with Father?" she demanded fretfully. "He's cross as two bears lately."

"Humph! Make it three," shrugged Gordon disrespectfully.

"Hush! I'm ashamed of you," protested Sister Sue, a worried look coming to her face. "Something is plaguing him; I know there is. Or else he's — sick."

"Well, if he's sick, I know who'll have to be his

nurse — and it *won't* be Cousin Abby," teased Gordon, his eyes merry.

"Sue, *shall* we wear pink or blue, or will you have it a rainbow wedding, with all the colors?" palpitated May. "Oh, have it a rainbow wedding, Sister Sue, please have it a rainbow wedding!"

"Yes, *please* have it a rainbow wedding, Sister Sue!" mocked Gordon mischievously. "Only I supposed rainbows came *after* the storm — not before it," he chuckled as he rose from the table.

"For shame, Gordon Gilmore!" remonstrated May indignantly. "As if there was going to be any storm after *this* wedding! This is going to be the live-happy-ever-after kind, is n't it, Sister Sue?"

But Sister Sue only drew a long sigh. Her troubled eyes were still on the doorway through which John Gilmore had disappeared a few moments before.

"May, something *is* worrying Father," she said then, in an anxious voice, rising to her feet. "I wonder what it is."

Two days later she knew. Indeed, the whole world knew — their world. For big black headlines, sprawling across the front page of every morning newspaper in the city, told that the old firm of Gilmore and Glode, Bankers and Brokers, had gone to the wall. They told also that Glode had shot himself in his office, and that the senior member, John Gilmore, had collapsed under the strain, and was taken home unconscious. All this they told. But they did not tell of the horror and heartache, the tears, exclamations, and lamentations, the terror by night and the con-

fusion by day; the telephoning, telegraphing, messengers, doctors, nurses, hurried consultations, and quick orders.

At the Gilmores' it was Sister Sue, of course, whose shoulders were under the entire load. It was she who quieted May's hysterics, soothed Katy and Mary, calmed Gordon, gave directions, sent telegrams and messages, and then appeared at her father's bedside to assure his waking consciousness that everything was all right and that he was not to worry one bit. And John Gilmore, his befogged brain not in condition to realize anything clearly, recognized the staff upon which he had leaned for the past six years, and obediently leaned back to the comfortable consciousness that everything was, indeed, all right.

From Martin Kent Sister Sue had received first a shocked telephonic inquiry, then a box of beautiful roses and an exquisitely worded note, assuring her of his undying affection and sympathy, and telling her how hard it was for him to refrain from flying on the swift feet of love straight to her side; but that he realized how full her hands and heart must be at this most distressing time, and he would not demand even one moment's attention to add a feather's weight to her already overburdened dear self; that when things were more calm and she was a little rested, he would come. Until that time he was her very devoted lover, whose thoughts were always with her, even though he was forcing his feet to keep from seeking her.

The gist of this, only couched in very different

terms, Sister Sue said to Gordon in response to his irate question, the third day after the crash, as to where Martin Kent was.

"He will come later. He wrote, and he sent me some beautiful flowers, and said that he wanted to come now, but that he knew I'd be too busy to see him, and he'd wait till I had more time."

"Humph!" growled Gordon. "Till you had more time, indeed! Why does n't he come and *do* something for you, so you'll *have* more time?"

"Nonsense, Gordon! There's nothing he can do, I'm sure," protested Sister Sue, with a haste so precipitate that it looked suspiciously like an old argument already used to convince some one other than the indignant youth now before her. "He — he is trying to help the best way he knows, by staying away and not bothering us. He feels so sorry for us! He wrote a beautiful letter."

"Humph!" ejaculated Gordon again. "A lot he cares!"

"Oh, but he does care," interposed May, before her sister could speak. "I saw him yesterday on the Avenue, and he turned and walked with me; and he *told* me how much he cared, and how sorry he was for us. He's broken-hearted."

"Well, maybe he *is* that — at the failure of Gilmore and Glode," murmured the young fellow, with an expressive lift of the eyebrow.

"Indeed he is!" If there was a covert insinuation in Gordon's words, his sister May gave no sign of having noticed it. "And he spoke perfectly beauti-

fully of Father, and said how dreadful it must be to see him like this, and how did we endure it! And he said he never could stand seeing suffering like that. He simply could n't. He's so sensitive, you know! Oh, he feels dreadfully, I know he does," reiterated May, as her brother, with a shrug and a superior smile, turned away. "Does n't he, Sister Sue?" she appealed then to the elder girl.

"Why, yes, of course! Of course he feels dreadfully," corroborated Sister Sue. "He wrote a beautiful letter — a perfectly beautiful letter. And he's coming soon to see us. He says he simply can't stay away very long."

Sister Sue laughed and blushed a little self-consciously as she finished speaking. But there was still that curious little precipitate haste in voice and manner as if in effort to carry unmistakable conviction.

It was on the fourth evening after John Gilmore had been carried upstairs to his room that Martin Kent called. He brought red roses again; and he had made his appointment by telephone. His fiancée was awaiting him alone in the living-room.

He was very tender, very loving. Even the manner in which he kissed her showed how deeply grieved he was for her. And to-night it was not his own affairs that he spoke of first.

"Now talk to me. Tell me everything. I want to know all your plans, darling," he begged, as they seated themselves before the open fire.

She drew a long sigh. Her eyes, fixed on his face, were wistful and infinitely weary.

"It will be good, just to sit and talk — a little while," she admitted. "Oh, Martin, I'm so tired! There have been so many things to think of."

"Of course there have, dear."

"And there has n't been any one but me to decide — everything."

"I know it. But *that*'s nothing new — to you, dear." He was plainly trying to raise her spirits.

She smiled faintly, even while she sighed.

"Oh, yes, I know. But there's never been anything like this before. Oh, Martin, it's so awful, so perfectly awful to see — Father."

The man stirred a little restlessly.

"Yes, yes, I know; it must be — very terrible. But just don't — don't think of it, darling."

"But I *have* to think of it. I have to think — what to do."

"You mean —" He waited for her to finish his sentence.

"I mean that everything will have to be different now, of course."

He threw a quick look into her eyes.

"You don't mean — that you won't marry me?"

"Oh, no, not that. There'll be the wedding — only it'll be a *different* wedding." She smiled a little wistfully, and her voice broke. "It won't be much of a rainbow wedding now, I guess, with pink and blue bridesmaids and flowers and music and a big church full of guests! I'll be lucky if — if I have a white muslin to get married in."

"As if I cared about that!" he scoffed. But he did

not meet her eyes and he pulled a cigar from his pocket. "You don't mind if I smoke?"

She shook her head — an entirely unnecessary concession, for he had already struck the match alight.

"Of course you know we — we've lost everything," she said, after a moment's silence.

"So I judged if the newspapers told the truth," he nodded. "But as if we cared for that!" he exclaimed, his eyes still turned away. "However, was it really as bad — as they made it out?"

"I'm afraid so. Of course Father can't be questioned. It would n't do any good if we did question him. He does n't remember — much. And it's a mercy he does n't, of course."

"But won't he ever remember?"

"Perhaps — some things. The doctor says he'll be better than this very soon, and he may live for years. But he probably won't ever be quite right in his mind again. 'T was a nervous breakdown — a sort of shock to the nerves, he says. Oh, Martin, it's awful!"

"Yes, I know." Again the man stirred restlessly. "But what — what are your plans?"

"We don't know yet, except that we're to give up everything, of course. That's what folks always do, when they fail, is n't it?" She gave a weary little smile. "Mr. Loring has been out here every day. He knows everything about Father's affairs, you know — more than even Father himself, I guess. Anyway, he knows enough. We'll have to give up the house and the cars and everything here, of course."

"But where will you go?"

"I 'LL BE LUCKY IF — IF I HAVE A WHITE MUSLIN TO GET MARRIED IN"

"Vermont — Gilmoreville. Father owns the old Gilmore homestead there, and Mr. Loring says he thinks he can save that for us. It is n't much of a place, but you'd think, to hear Mr. Loring, that 't was a gold mine, and we were the luckiest things to have that much. And — well, maybe we shall be," she laughed unsteadily.

"What sort of a place is it? Ever been there?"

"Not much lately. We used to go when we were children, and we've been there a little two or three times since, in the summer. It's just a big country house in a country town. I must confess I don't exactly anticipate it. And I have n't *dared* to tell Gordon and May yet."

"It's a shame, Sue! I declare, I — I would n't stand it!" cried the man.

She shook her head with a long sigh.

"I'm afraid we've got to. It's the only thing, Mr. Loring says. And, anyway" — her eyes flashed a sudden spark almost mirthful — "I have thought of one advantage. It'll be good for you. You won't have to go away for — copy, Martin!"

With a sudden exclamation the man sprang to his feet. Up and down the room he paced, twice, three times, before he turned squarely about and faced the girl who was looking up at him with eyes that showed a puzzled questioning.

"Why, Martin, what's the matter?" she cried. "What have I said? You've talked yourself about hunting in country towns for — copy!"

"Sue, I've been thinking." He was still standing,

facing her. There was something tense about voice and manner. "I — I shan't be there to — to watch for copy."

"Why — *Martin!*" She had leaned forward. She sank back in her seat now, slowly, uncertainly, her eyes still searching his face.

With an abrupt movement the man came and sat down in the chair at her side. He took both her hands in his and held them fast while he talked.

"Dearest, I've been thinking. All these days while I've been away from you I've been thinking. I *could* think then. I can't think when I'm with you. I only think how I want you. But these last few days I've been thinking — of what you said to me the other night."

"The other night?"

"About your music — what you longed to do; what Signor Bartoni said you *could* do. And I thought how your dear eyes sparkled and shone, and how your whole face was illumined as you talked. And I thought what a selfish brute I was to attempt to chain your bright spirit to sordid everyday living, just because *I* wanted you with me. And so I came to-day determined to make amends as best I could. And now I'm telling you. I take it back — all my pleading. You have my full and free consent to spread your wings and fly. You have not only that, but my loving sympathy and all my good wishes."

"You mean — ?" Her eyes were incredulous.

"I mean, go on with your music. Make a name for yourself among the very greatest of earth."

"But, Martin, I — I gave that all up," she faltered.

"Why?"

"Why, because of — of what you said."

"Exactly! I knew it!" he triumphed. "And that's just what I mean! You gave it up because of me, and of what I said; because of my selfishness. And I won't have it. I've come to my senses now. I was a brute, darling, a selfish brute. But I'm not one any longer. Why, sweetheart, do you think I'd ever be happy again if I tied you down like that? Never! And now, dear, go out and win. I *want* you to! And you can win! You've got it in you! I know you have!"

He said more, much more. With all the eloquence with which he had pleaded against this "music madness" of hers, he pleaded now for it — only now it was not music madness. It was her "God-given message to the world."

And his task was easier this time; for it was not nearly so hard to bring back to the girl's ears the "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore!" as it had been to silence those clamorous voices a few short days before. And in the end he won, if Sister Sue's eager face and shining eyes were any criterion — until a new thought came to the girl's mind.

"Oh, but, Martin, I forgot. I can't now," she despaired. "There's the money."

"Have n't you anything of your own?"

She shook her head sadly.

"Not a thing — except some Magda Silver Mine stock, which is n't worth a cent, Mr. Loring says.

Father gave all us children ten thousand shares apiece ages ago. He's never given us money, only an allowance every month. Next year, when I am twenty-one, he was going to give me something. He always said he was. But now — Martin, I — I can't, after all," she choked. "I have n't the money."

"Pooh! Earn it!" he challenged her. "As if you could n't teach and study, too! And it'll be all the more credit to you when you *do* reach the goal."

"But do you really think I could?"

"I know you could."

She drew an ecstatic breath, though it ended in a sigh.

"Of course, there's Father to be looked out for; but he'll be all right. Cousin Abby's coming soon, and the doctor says he'll be up and around the room in a few days, anyway. Besides, Cousin Abby's a wonderful nurse and housekeeper. She's very capable. I should n't worry a bit with Cousin Abby here — I mean there in Gilmoreville."

"Then that's all right," summed up the man; "and everything's all right. And you forgive me now, for having been such a selfish brute in the first place?"

"Why, y-yes — no — I mean, you were n't a selfish brute, Martin."

The girl spoke feverishly, a little incoherently. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shone. She had the air of one who has come out of a shadowy forest into the bright sunlight where the way shows straight before, leading to cloud-kissed heights beyond, and yet

who cannot quite believe the evidence of eyes and ears.

"Do you think really I could — do — it?" she faltered.

"I know you could," he assured her again. And at his answer the peace of a great content settled upon her countenance.

It was still there when Martin Kent went away, leaving with her as a good-bye thought: "And we're all going to be so proud of you!"

Once again through the long night watches Sister Sue lay awake and thought. She was more calm now, more rational. True, the clamorous "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!" was still in her ears; but as a bit of ballast to keep her feet on the ground there was the thought that it now must all be brought about by her own efforts.

No golden-paved, flower-bedecked path of gentle ascent led to the heights for her. Nothing but her own digging would open the path before her now; and every step upward must be quarried out of the rock of opportunity by her own hand. Martin had said that. The girl thought of it now, and thrilled to the challenge of the words.

Of course she could do it! It just meant teaching while she was studying; and even in the teaching she would be learning. Besides, she had an added incentive now. Was it not absolutely necessary that she go out into the world and earn money? And how fortunate that she had this wonderful talent to enable her to do it!

And she would make big money when she should have become the great artiste. They always did. She was sure they did. And how she would love to add comforts and luxuries to the home, and make life easier for her father. Poor Father! Oh, how dreadful it all was!

But she would not think of that. She would think of how *she* was going to be the rescuer. She would think of the tangible help and comfort she was going to bring into the home. And it was so especially wonderful, because all the while she would be doing what she most wanted in all the world to do — go on with her beloved music, and make for herself a name and a place that was really worth while.

And how good of Martin Kent to let her do it, after she had promised to marry him in July! But, of course, it was only for a time. Later they would be married. But now —

And once more with the inspiriting "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!" in her ears, she fell asleep.

In the morning, at the breakfast-table, Sister Sue broke the news to her brother and sister that they were to go to Gilmoreville to live. The new joy that had come to her had given her courage for the unpleasant task. Besides, she realized that the time had come when they must know the changes in store for them. Yet her heart beat faster and her lips were dry as she began to speak.

"Well, children, of course you know that we've got to leave here," she announced cheerfully. "So I sup-

pose the sooner we begin to prepare for it, the better. The doctor says Father will be up and dressed in a week; and Mr. Loring says we'd better begin to break up as soon as possible after that."

"Tough luck!" ejaculated Gordon.

"I suppose we'll have to go into a snippy little house or flat on some mean little street, and we'll be so ashamed when folks call," May pouted.

"Not a bit of it," contradicted Sister Sue, with a jauntiness that was a little forced. "They'll have to come a long way if they're going to call on us! We're going to Gilmoreville."

"That little country town?" Gordon's voice expressed unbelieving disgust.

"But of course it's only for the summer," suggested May hopefully.

Sister Sue wet her lips. It was going to be even harder than she thought.

"We don't know how long it'll have to be," she reasoned, still cheerily. "But however long it's to be we've got to go; so don't fret. Besides, Gilmoreville is a lovely old town, and we may enjoy it. Who knows?"

"Enjoy it! — a stupid little place like that?" disdained May. "Why, Sue, you know what that town is. There is n't a thing going on, and we just hated it the last time we were there! Have we got to go?" she demanded tearfully.

"Yes, we've got to go."

"Oh, well, cheer up," cut in Gordon. "There ought to be good fishing and maybe hunting; and the cars'll

help. Besides, we'll be off to school winters, anyway. So we shan't be there much, after all."

"Well, yes, that's so," admitted May, a little less dolefully. "We shan't be there much, after all."

Sister Sue wet her lips again. She assumed a blithe confidence she was very far from feeling.

"Oh, come, come, children, this will never do in the world. This is n't a matter for argument. We've just got to do it and there's no use fretting. Furthermore, there won't be any car nor any expensive schools and colleges for either of you — just yet. You don't seem to understand. We're *poor*, I tell you."

"No car! No college!" cried Gordon.

"Have we lost everything?" demanded May.

Sister Sue sighed.

"I should think so, pretty nearly, by the way Mr. Loring talks. He seems to think we're lucky to have even Gilmoreville to go to."

"It's all so blamed sudden," fumed Gordon.

"To us — yes. But I don't think it was — to Father." Sister Sue's voice shook a little. "He's been worried and irritable and absent-minded for quite a while. You know he has."

"But I don't see how we're going to live at all," quavered May. "I don't see how we're going to stand it!"

"But we've got to stand it," declared her sister. "We've just got to! And it may not be so bad, after all. Just think of the ideas for stories you may get there, May! You know Martin loves just such places for copy. We shall have to let Mary go, of course;

but we'll take Katy. And Cousin Abby's a splendid housekeeper and a good nurse for Father if he should need her. Besides, we'll hope it won't be for long." A rosy glow suffused her face, and her eyes grew luminous. "I'm going to earn money. I have n't told you that. Maybe I can earn enough, after a little, to help about the schools, too, for both of you. Oh, I hope I can!"

"Earn money! *You!*" ejaculated Gordon.

"Yes. I'm going on with my music. I'm going to do — what I wanted to do before, only now I shall have to work a little harder, because I shall have to teach while I'm studying to pay my way. But when I've won out — when I get there," she hurried on, ignoring their interrupting ejaculations, "then the money'll begin to come in instead of going out, and — and we shan't have to live in Gilmoreville any longer!"

She stopped, a little out of breath, her eager, glowing eyes seeking first one face, then the other, for appreciation, understanding, and answering enthusiasm. But she found neither appreciation nor understanding. She found, too, no answering enthusiasm. She found only disappointment, dismay, and vexed anger in the faces before her.

"You don't mean we've got to go to that awful place to live, and have Cousin Abby, too, all alone, and not have you at all?" gasped May.

"Oh, come, Sis, that's too much to expect any fellow to stand!" exploded Gordon wrathfully.

"But there's the money — I'm going to earn the

money. We *need* the money," urged Sister Sue. "You don't want to forget that."

"We're not forgetting Cousin Abby either," cut in Gordon. "We're not forgetting —" He stopped short, an odd look coming to his face. "Why, where does Kent come in? I thought you two were going to be married?"

"We were; but we are n't now till later. He's going to let me go on with my music and — and be a concert pianist instead. He knew how I wanted to. He said that he felt that it was very wrong and selfish for him to try to keep me from it. So he let me off from my promise to marry him in July."

"Humph! I notice he did n't let you off until after — this happened," observed Gordon.

Again, if there was a covert insinuation in the youth's words and manner, no one seemed to notice it.

"There was n't the need, before, that I should earn money," Sister Sue reminded him, with some dignity.

"But there's all that beautiful rainbow wedding," bemoaned May. "Oh, Sue, how can you give it all up?"

"Oh, but think of what I'm getting!" cried Sister Sue, her face, still eager and alight. "To go on with my work, and — Oh, the mail," she broke off as Katy appeared at the door, several letters in her hand, the greater share of which a moment later were placed at the elder daughter's plate.

While Gordon was reading his single letter, and

May hers, Sister Sue picked out a pale-blue envelope from the pile and hastily opened it.

As she read, all the light and eagerness faded from her face, leaving it suddenly pinched and drawn-looking. With hands that shook a little, she folded the letter, put it back in its envelope and raised her head. The cold quietness of her voice as she began to speak won the instant attention of both her auditors.

"You need not worry any more about Cousin Abby. She's just written me a letter. She sends her love and sympathy in this time of our great trial, and says she could n't think of burdening us with her presence at a time like this. So she's not coming."

The next minute May and Gordon found themselves alone. Sister Sue had picked up her letters and left the room.

"Why, what —" began May, with puzzled eyes.

"Quitter, *quitter!*" stormed Gordon. It was as if the surge of emotion of the last few minutes had found a welcome outlet. "That's just the kind of a woman I thought Cousin Abby was!"

"Why, Gordon, are n't you glad? I thought you did n't want Cousin Abby to come!" cried May.

"What if I don't?" retorted Gordon, with the lofty scorn of an unaccustomed cloak of righteous indignation. "That does n't hinder my saying she's a quitter, does it? And her always teasing to come when we had plenty of money, and backing out now just when we want her!"

"But we *don't* want her," demurred May, with a frown.

"That does n't make any difference — *she* does n't know it. She's a quitter, just the same; and all because we're poor now, and she can't ride in the limousine, and order the maids around, and cut a dash generally. You *know* what she was that time Sister Sue was sick! She's a quitter, I tell you," decreed Gordon, still wearing that unaccustomed cloak of righteous scorn as he rose from the table.

CHAPTER IV

"LAST THINGS"

THEY were not easy — those days that followed; they were not easy for any of the Gilmore family, least of all for Sister Sue, the answerer of every question, the buffer for every complaint, the final arbiter of every dispute.

They were the easiest, perhaps, for the suddenly-grown-old man in the master's chamber upstairs. John Gilmore was up and dressed, and about his room now. The doctor said he was much better; that he would probably continue to gain until he was physically able to do most of the things that any fairly healthy man sixty-five years old could do. There was nothing to be done, therefore, but to keep him in the best health possible — until the inevitable final breakdown came, perhaps in one year, perhaps in two years, perhaps not for five, or even ten years. He had the mentality at present of a child. That might improve, and it might not. He should be kept happy and contented — and it would take very little to do that, usually. Though there might be times — The doctor did not finish his sentence; and Sister Sue, to whom he had been speaking, did not press the matter, after a glance at his face, and at her father's.

John Gilmore recognized his children, realized where he was, and understood that he had been sick and was getting better. He even knew that he was

going to his old home in Gilmoreville before long; and he was anticipating the trip very much, he said. He liked Gilmoreville, and it would be good to see the old home again. He asked his daughter Sue if his mother was going to be there. And his daughter, with only a little catch of the breath to betray the fact that she knew his mother had been dead twenty-five years, told him quietly no, she would not be there.

There was little that John Gilmore could do to occupy his time. He could read, but reading seemed to tire him. He liked better to cut out the advertising pictures from the papers; and his daughter Sue, seeing this, brought in some children's bright-colored picture books one day, which pleased him greatly. He never spoke of business. He never mentioned the firm of Gilmore and Glode. And those who talked with him were only too glad that he should keep silence on the subject. They were very thankful that Memory, however sadly she had served him, had at least done him this one good turn.

Not that there were many who talked with him or who saw him. The doctor, of course, came, but only twice a week now. Mr. Loring had come once; but, though Mr. Gilmore called him by name, and asked politely for his health, yet his presence seemed to fill the invalid with a vague unrest, evidenced by uneasy, searching glances into the visitor's face, and a nervous tapping of the fingers on the arms of the chair. So Mr. Loring did not come again.

Martin Kent had called once; but he, too, had not come again, though John Gilmore had greeted him

cordially, and had seemed to enjoy showing him the new pictures he had been cutting out.

Gordon and May never came into the room now. Urged by Sister Sue they had come a few times at first, for a very few moments. But almost at once they had fled, shuddering, with their hands to their ears and a horror-stricken "Oh, Sister Sue, Sister Sue, how can you bear to see him like that?"

Even Mary did not come into the room now to make the bed and "tidy up." After the third burst of tears and the third shriek on her part in answer to her master's query as to whether or not she liked to cut out the pretty pictures, Sister Sue excused her from further duties in the room, thenceforth taking upon herself the task of keeping the chamber in order, except for the weekly cleaning when Mary came in, and John Gilmore walked through his bathroom to his "den" beyond — a room in which he had never cared to stay and which he now seemed to dislike more than ever.

The nurse at first engaged had been discharged. He did not need a nurse, the doctor said, and her presence seemed to fret and distress him. It had simmered down then to the doctor and Sister Sue as being his only visitors, day in and day out. As yet he had not appeared to care to go downstairs, nor had his daughter tried to have him go. His meals she brought in herself on the tray left by Mary three times a day just outside his door.

Truth to tell, as matters were, Sister Sue was quite content to have her father stay where he was. Be-

yond the fact of his deplorable condition, she did not worry about him then, for she knew where he was. Moreover, if he were downstairs, it would be impossible to keep some of the confusion and horror from penetrating even his befogged brain. As it was, upstairs he was content; and in a way his room made a sort of refuge to fly to when conditions downstairs became particularly unbearable. Sad and heart-breaking though it was to see him in that condition, yet in his placid presence his sorely tried daughter could find at least a few minutes' respite from problems that threatened to be too great for her to solve.

Beset and besieged and importuned on all sides, Sister Sue did surely need some refuge. She wondered sometimes if she were going to have sufficient strength to go through it. If it had not been for her piano, she thought she could not, indeed, have endured it. But she could still find each day in her beloved keyboard the means to vent her weariness, worry, and utter dejection. And never yet thus far had there failed to creep into the music, before she rose from the piano, a triumphant strain that told that the player had found somewhere a new hope and a new courage to take up the next day's burdens.

Sometimes for a few minutes during the day, and nearly always in the evening, Sister Sue found time to snatch these few precious moments at the piano. The members of her household and Martin Kent, knowing her so well, were not surprised at this seeming waste of time when so many important matters

awaited her attention. But Daniel Loring, finding her at the piano, and noticing particularly the tripping melodies and sonorous chords, and not recognizing them as the evidence of a hard-won victory, wondered within him sometimes: "How in the dickens can she do it?"

Daniel Loring came nearly every day now. He had been appointed conservator of the estate by the Probate Court. There was much to be done; there were many matters to be settled.

It had been ten weeks since the failure and the house was already sold. Many of the expensive furnishings had gone also at private sales. There was to be an auction later for the few things remaining. Even the master of the house upstairs was sorting out his pictures on a solid mahogany table which was already the property of his neighbor down the Avenue, whose generous consideration for his old friend was leaving it where it was — until such time as its former owner should take his scissors and picture books to Gilmoreville, Vermont.

The beautiful limousine and the high-power touring car had been among the first of their possessions to go, though May freely expressed her opinion of the short-sightedness of not leaving these till the last when she and Sister Sue particularly needed them for all their good-bye calls and parties. (To have been strictly accurate, May should have spoken for herself alone; Sister Sue was not making good-bye calls or attending good-bye parties. But May was not always strictly accurate in her assertions.) The chauffeur,

of course, had gone, and Mary was to go when the month was out. Katy was still there and would go with them to Gilmoreville.

Martin Kent called occasionally. Toward his fiancée he was all sympathy, all love, all tenderness. He smoothed her hair and caressed her hands, and said what a wretched shame it was that his dear little sweetheart should have to go through this awful thing! He sent her flowers and candy; but when she begged him to advise her as to what price to set on the library furniture, and as to the advisability of certain sales recommended by Mr. Loring, he threw his hands in the air and shook his head vehemently, declaring that he had a miserable head for business and that he had n't the faintest idea what to tell her to do. So he was not much assistance to her in that way.

She had told him at the very first, after Cousin Abby's letter came, that of course all idea of going on with her music must be abandoned now, as it was out of the question for her to leave her father at present. He had sympathized very tenderly with her at the time, and had bemoaned the cruel fate that tied her bright spirit to sordid affairs of everyday living. He had said, too, how thankful he was that at least he had been man enough at the last to urge her to develop her divine gift, and that whatever happened, he would have the blissful consciousness of knowing that it was not through *his* selfishness that she was being kept from realizing her ambitions. He spoke beautifully of her noble self-sacrifice, and as-

sured her that Heaven's richest reward would be hers.

Not until after he had gone that evening, however, did it occur to his fiancée that he had not said anything about her renewing her pledge to marry him in July, now that the possibility of a career of her own must be abandoned.

Alone, in the dark, she flushed hotly, as she thought of it.

"Of course, I could marry him, I suppose," she admitted to herself. "He was coming home to live with us, anyway. But — well, probably he did n't want to trouble me now with talking about it. He thought I had enough to think of, as it is," she assured herself with a resoluteness that hinted at the necessity of placating a little hurt something that still questioned within her.

As the days passed, Martin Kent still apparently thought best not to "bother" his fiancée with pleadings for an early marriage. At all events, he said nothing about her former promise to marry him in July, though he was yet very devoted and lover-like in his behavior. If the girl herself noticed this, she gave no sign. Her attention, apparently, was entirely taken up with other matters.

And Heaven knew there were plenty of such!

Sister Sue had hoped, at the first, to keep her piano. But it was a fine instrument and in excellent condition; and she knew that it must go, even before Mr. Loring appeared one day with a purchaser who offered a price quite too large to refuse. Like the fur-

niture in the master's bedroom, however, the piano was to stay until the family themselves were ready to go. So Sister Sue was still enabled to seek its comfort and inspiration. But even after the big fat man with the diamond stick-pin in his tie had drawn the check that made the instrument his, sensitive ears might have detected in the notes that fell from Sister Sue's fingers a tragic undertone of longing and renunciation in even the most triumphant of the chords and melodies.

April passed and May came. They were to go early in June immediately upon the closing of the exclusive private schools which May and Gordon attended. Downstairs the house was already nearly empty. Mary had gone, and only Katy, red-eyed and gloomy, full of prophecies of evil, remained in the kitchen. Gordon, spending every spare minute out of school off with "the boys," was admittedly trying to get in all the pleasure he could before he "buried himself for life." May, almost habitually now in tears except when away from home, was saying her farewells in one grand whirl of gayety, willingly chaperoned by Mrs. Henderson. John Gilmore, greatly improved in health, but not in mind, was getting restless in his somewhat restricted quarters, and was importuning his daughter Sue as to when he could go downstairs. He told her he had been sick quite as long as he wanted to be; and he declared that he should never get his strength back until he got out of doors.

Sister Sue, nearly distracted with them all, was

doing "last things" too. But her last things did not consist of uproarious frolics off with the boys, nor of tearful, violet-scented kisses at pink teas. They consisted of hurried directions as to packing certain trunks and boxes for shipment to Gilmoreville, and of stoically calm last looks at household treasures being borne down the steps on the shoulders of stalwart men to the great vans which would take them to the homes of those who would, in days to come, never cease to boast of the bargains they got "when Gilmore and Glode failed, don't you know."

True, Sister Sue did make one farewell call. Two days before they started for Gilmoreville, she went to see Signor Bartoni. She thanked him for all he had done for her, and for the kind encouragement he had given her, which meant to her, oh, so much more than she could ever express in words. Then, with very red cheeks and very bright eyes, she told him that she had been obliged, of course, to give up all idea of training herself for a concert pianist for the present; but that she still had hopes that some day —

She did not finish her sentence; and Signor Bartoni, reading aright the little choke that broke the sentence off short, made haste to assure her that yes, yes, he was very sure she would go back to her music with renewed vigor and strength; that it would be a "pi-tee" and a "cr-rime" not to.

Sister Sue went home then. Her cheeks were still red and her eyes were still bright until she had boarded the crowded trolley car at the corner of the

street. There, clinging to the strap, and swaying with the motion of the car, she relaxed suddenly, as if somewhere had snapped a taut cord. The red fled from her cheeks and the sparkle from her eyes. She was white-faced and shaking when she reached home, and her hands and feet were cold and numb.

In her own room, ten minutes later, she was putting away in her trunk a photograph and several clippings cut from magazines and newspapers. The photograph was the likeness of America's greatest woman pianist — a being whom Sister Sue had always worshiped (as at a shrine), ever since hearing her play two years before. The clippings were every scrap and bit of information that she had been able to gather concerning the object of her adoration. The picture had occupied an honored position upon her dressing-table and the clippings had been within easy reach of her hand for frequent perusal. She put them all now in the very bottom of her trunk.

Martin Kent called that evening. On a trunk and a packing-box they sat before the fire in the library. As usual they were alone.

"More farewells, I suppose — your sister and Gordon," smiled the man, asking with a gesture if he might smoke.

"Yes. Mrs. Henderson called for May in the car. It's a theater and supper to-night, I believe." Sister Sue looked a little sober. "Mrs. Henderson has been very kind, and it's wonderful that May has had this chance. Of course I have been good for nothing as a chaperon for weeks past. The only trouble is, I'm

afraid it's going to be all the harder — when the end comes."

"You mean Gilmoreville?"

"Yes."

The man blew a smoke-ring, then clasped his knee with both arms.

"You've never told me. What's it like — Gilmoreville?" he asked then.

"Oh, yes, I have. Don't you remember? I told you it would be a lovely place to get copy; that is —" She stopped abruptly, a bright color flaming to the roots of her hair as she threw a swift sideways glance into the man's face.

But Martin Kent did not seem to be noticing.

"It's just a little country town, then," he commented indifferently, his eyes on another smoke-ring.

"Yes."

"That will be hard for people who like the gay white way and pink teas — Gordon and your sister May, for instance. And — how about you, dear?" He turned now, and looked into her face.

"Oh, I shall survive, I fancy." Her eyes were carefully averted. "I shall be — busy" — her voice was not quite steady — "and there's nothing like work to take up one's mind, you know."

"By George, it's a beastly shame!" stormed the man vehemently. "To bury you like that in a measly little country town! How big is the place, anyway?"

"Oh, three or four thousand, I suppose."

"You've been there before, you said, I believe."

"Oh, yes, many times, especially when we were children. We rather liked it then, for a little while in the summer. We have n't been so often of late years, nor stayed so long. But Father always liked it. I'm glad of that. He'll be more contented there, I hope. He's getting terribly restless here. Oh, Martin, you don't know how I dread it to-morrow, taking him down through the halls. You see, he's just been in his little suite upstairs, and he does n't know a thing of what's been done — outside."

"What does the doctor say?"

"Why, he says we've got to take him, and, anyway, he thinks he'll be all right. But he and Mr. Loring are going to be in the library within call, so if I *should* need them, but they think it's better to keep out of sight unless I do. The doctor says Father may question a little, and look worried and confused; but — oh, Martin, Martin, seems as if I — I just could n't have it! Father — *Father* — like that!" Her voice choked into a sob and she put both hands to her eyes.

"Darling, don't!" With a jerk the man tossed his cigar into the fire and crowded himself on to the packing-case at her side. Then, with all his skill and magic of words, he soothed and comforted her until he had her laughing through her tears. Then, as if to divert her mind from her father, he went back to his questions concerning Gilmoreville.

"How about the house? Is that comfortable?"

"Yes, oh, yes, in a way. Of course it's just a great

big old-fashioned country house with stoves and fireplaces, though."

"It's all furnished?"

"Oh, yes, after a fashion. We're not taking any furniture from here. We did n't really need to. Besides, Mr. Loring said we 'd better not. Everything here had to be sold — to help out, you know."

"Even the piano! That was the toughest thing of all, dear. But there's one up there, of course. You would n't have left yourself without anything!"

She gave a faint smile.

"Oh, yes, there's one there," she admitted, "after a fashion, like the rest of the things. It's an old square one with octagon legs. It sounds a good deal like a tinkling cymbal, if you know what that is. I don't. But it *sounds* as if it sounded like that! Still, it'll be better than nothing, I suppose."

"Is the house open? Will there be any one there to — to meet you?"

"Oh, yes, the Prestons. They're the people who have lived there all these years and kept it in good order. They have three rooms for their own, and we'll let them stay, I imagine. They had their rent for looking after the place a little. Of course, when we were there, or when they did extra things for us, Father paid them for it. But we can't pay them anything now, of course. It'll be just what little odd jobs they do for their rent."

"But you'll keep them there?"

"Mercy, yes! Why, they've always been there, Martin. I should as soon think of trying to move one

of the big trees in the lawn," smiled the girl. "Besides, I don't want to. Mrs. Preston is a dear. We children always adored her. She's quite a character, too. You may get —" For some unapparent reason the girl stopped short, a sudden color flooding her face. Then at once she hurried on with a haste that was almost precipitate. "You may get — get quite an idea of what she is when I tell you that Granny Preston is quite a personage in Gilmoreville. She knows everything that —"

With an impatient gesture Martin Kent turned upon her almost savagely.

"A personage, indeed!" he interrupted. "And *you* have to endure *that!* A Granny Preston, who knows everything! Sue, is there *any* one in that infernal town — er — fit to be — your associate?"

The girl laughed merrily; but almost instantly her face sobered and she looked very grave, with a tinge of anger and resentment in her eyes. But there was still another change the next moment when she spoke. Her eyes were twinkling now.

"Oh, yes; yes, indeed, Martin. We live right next to the Kendalls; and the Kendalls have two motor cars and use finger bowls every day — real common, you know. And there are the Grays — he's worth at least ten thousand dollars; and the Whipples keep a maid, and have a real show place with a *porte-cochère* that everybody who comes to Gilmoreville is always taken to see. And the Sargents — they have a man come two days a week to mow the lawn, and —"

"Sue!"

The girl laughed roguishly. Then again her face grew sober, but there was no anger or resentment in her eyes now.

"Yes, I know I was making fun that time; but I was only giving you a few of the choicest morsels in some of Mrs. Preston's quarterly letters to Father. Seriously, dear, there are some very charming people in Gilmoreville, and some otherwise, of course. Like any town of its size, it has its would-be smart set, which I imagine will have very little to do with us — *now*. But there are clubs and churches, and a few families of real culture and education, besides many of genuine worth with kind hearts and level heads, even if their grammar and their manners are not above reproach."

"How about those people next door? — what did you call them?"

"With the finger bowls?" smiled Sister Sue. "The Kendalls. He's the richest man in town, I suppose. He makes shoes. She's a good woman, a bit spoiled, perhaps, by her money — they have n't always had it. They have a son who is getting really famous, I hear, as a violinist."

"Not Donald Kendall?"

"Yes."

"Do *you* know *him?*"

"I did once. We used to play together as children a little. But he was older than we were, and, if I remember rightly, rather domineering and disagreeable. We never got on very well together. I have n't seen him for years — eight or nine, I guess. He has

not been there when we have lately — and *we* have not been there a great deal."

"Hm-m," commented the man. "I heard him once. Great player!"

"So I understand, and — oh, he's not the only celebrity that hails from Gilmoreville, let me tell you! There's Kate Farnum, the novelist, and Viola Sanderson, the singer, and Cy Bellows, and —"

"Not the *real* Cy, the ball-player?"

"Surely! I see you *are* impressed now!" Her eyes were merry again. "But you must n't be too impressed. Please remember that these celebrated personages are not there now. They won't be dropping in to breakfast every day. They just were there, once — born there. There's just Granny Preston there now. *She* did n't go away, you know," finished Sister Sue, with an emphasis that was as merry as it was unmistakable.

With a shrug of his shoulders Martin Kent got abruptly to his feet.

"I'm glad your courage is so good," he observed dryly, a curious irritation in voice and manner.

Five minutes later he was gone; and though his kiss at parting had been tender, and his words very loving, there was still underneath it all that same curious irritation.

CHAPTER V

GILMOREVILLE

It was little more than a half-day's journey to Gilmoreville from Boston, and Sister Sue knew that she had been hoping that Martin Kent would make it with them. She was dreading the trip especially for her father, and she was fearing what he might do on the journey. She felt that if she had a strong man like Martin with her, she would be much easier in her mind. But she did not like to ask him to go, especially in the face of his very obvious avoidance of the presence of the sick man, even in the Gilmores' own home.

When the day came finally for the start, Sister Sue was still hoping against hope that he would go with them. Nor did she quite give up till his telephone message came that morning to the effect that he would meet them at the station and see them off. She knew then that upon her own shoulders must rest the entire responsibility of the trip.

Even from the very beginning she found that she stood alone; for as soon as the doctor and Mr. Loring had disappeared into the library, May and Gordon hurried out to the waiting cab, May calling back:

"Now wait till we're inside before you get Father. *We* don't want to be there when he comes down!"

At her words, Katy, standing in the hall with the remaining bags, picked up a suitcase in each hand and hurried after the two young people.

Behind them Sister Sue, alone on the stairway, bit her lip and forced back a choking something in her throat. Then, with chin up, she turned and began to ascend the stairs. But her feet lagged, and it was plainly only sheer will power that carried them up at all.

On all sides were bare walls, bare windows, bare floors; and Sister Sue saw them, and shivered.

Just what would be the effect on her father when he should step across the threshold of his chamber into — this? Would he pass through unnoticing, or would the shock of the echoing bareness snap the taut something that held his brain in leash and restore memory and understanding? And if it did, would the revelation mean hours, days, months, even years of full consciousness of the catastrophe, or would it mean one blinding flash of anguish to be succeeded immediately by blank oblivion?

To Sister Sue, holding her breath outside her father's door, the one seemed hardly less terrible than the other.

At that moment from the room beyond came the sound of a clock's striking nine; and with a little choking sob the girl pulled a key from the pocket of her dress and hurriedly fitted it into the lock; for some days now John Gilmore had been very literally a prisoner, his daughter not daring to trust his rapidly increasing activity to the unrestricted freedom of an unlocked door.

"Well, Father, are you all ready?" she called gayly. "The car is here. You know I said I'd be up at nine

o'clock." Then she stopped and caught her breath with a little half-suppressed cry, so fine and splendid and handsome did the man look, standing by the table facing her.

John Gilmore, carefully groomed and fully dressed, even to hat, top coat, and cane, looked so near like the John Gilmore of Gilmore and Glode, that she almost expected him to say peremptorily:

"Tell Jackson I'll want the car right away, please, and telephone Loring that I've started, and shall expect him to meet me at the First National in half an hour."

But the tall, distinguished-looking man standing by the table did not say that. He opened his lips — and with his first words the illusion of the prosperous, prominent banker, was quite gone.

"Sue, I can't find my pictures, not a single one of them. I can't go without my pictures!" he fretted. "Where are they, Sue?"

The girl drew a long breath.

"They're quite safe, dear. I packed them myself last night. Don't you remember? I told you. Come, we're all ready. The trunks went last night and the bags are all in the car. And we have a beautiful day to start," she chatted on. They were going through the doorway into that bare hall now, and Sister Sue, in spite of her blithe voice, was trembling with the fear of the next two minutes, her eyes shrinking from what they dreaded to see, yet refusing to leave the man's face. "May and Gordon are already in the car, waiting. Come, Father, we don't want to lose

that train. You know trains don't wait for people, and—"

"Why, *Sue!*" At the head of the stairs the man had come to a full stop in spite of the urge of the girl's arm.

From sheer inability to make her dry lips articulate the rest of her sentence, Sister Sue stopped and waited for him to speak.

"Why, Sue, what is the matter here? Things look — queer." He had the groping air of one trying to peer through the dark to find the outlines of some familiar object.

"Yes, I know, dear; but, come, Father — hurry. We don't want to lose that train, you know!" She pulled gently at his arm.

In obedience he began to descend the stairs slowly, his groping eyes still peering into the hall below.

"But, they're all gone, Sue — everything!"

"Yes, dear, and we're going, too, you know. We're going to Gilmoreville."

"Oh, yes — Gilmoreville." They were in the lower hall now. The door to the library, behind which she knew were the two listening men, was closed. So, too, was the door to the drawing-room on the other side. Sister Sue had seen to that. The front door lay before them, wide open, inviting them. "Oh, yes, Gilmoreville," repeated the man, his eyes still troubled, questioning, turning from side to side.

"You *wanted* to go there, you know," Sister Sue reminded him cheerily. They were safely by the two closed doors that she had most feared now.

"Yes, oh, yes, I like Gilmoreville. But you took the pictures?" His eyes sought her face fearfully.

"Yes, every one of them. And I bought two lovely new books of them yesterday downtown, too. You 'll like those, I'm sure."

They were at the outer door. In a moment they were descending the steps. On the sidewalk John Gilmore paused again, his eyes on the cab and its driver.

"That's not Jackson. Is that our car?"

"No, but it's all right. Step right in, Father. We've got to hurry, you know, for that train!"

And John Gilmore stepped in. And as his foot touched the running-board the girl behind him turned with a smile and a wave of the hand toward the two men watching from the library window.

The men waved back vigorously and nodded their heads in obvious congratulation. They caught her answering nod and the flash of her smile; but they could not hear her relieved sigh as she stepped in after her father and the door closed behind her.

In the cab May whispered an excited question:

"How was he? Was he all right?"

"Yes, yes — hush! Talk about the weather, the scenery — anything; but don't let *him* talk," begged Sister Sue.

"I saw the doctor and Mr. Loring watching from the window," whispered Gordon. "I s'pose they'll — 'tend to things."

"Yes, everything. Now let's forget it all — back there," cried Sister Sue, her anxious eyes still searching her father's face.

It was not a long trip to the station and it proved to be an uneventful one. With calm dignity John Gilmore sat back in his seat, commenting pleasantly on the various sights from the window, much to the very plain relief of his three children.

In the station they found Martin Kent awaiting them. He was very kind. He asked if they had their tickets and he arranged about their baggage. He bought flowers, candy, and books; and he told Sister Sue that her father was looking finely; and he said what a handsome man he was, to be sure, and what a pity it was that he should have gone to pieces like that! But he very carefully avoided speaking to the man himself. He told May, in a low voice, that it would kill him if he had to be with him the way Sister Sue was. And May said, yes, it would her, too; and she did n't see how Sister Sue *stood* it. He went with them into the car and piled up the candy and the books and the flowers all around them, and told them he hoped they'd have a very pleasant journey.

It was left for May to say, as he turned away:

"Come up soon, Martin, *please!* We shall just *die* up there alone with *nobody!* You *will* come?"

"Of course I'll come," he nodded back at her. "Now take good care of your sister Sue, for me," he finished, with a flashing smile which included both the girls.

"May, how could you ask him to do that?" remonstrated Sister Sue, her face scarlet.

"Why, what an idea! Of course I'd ask him to come up! Why not?"

"But, May, he has n't said a word about coming — not a word!"

"What if he has n't?" retorted May aggrievedly. "Of course he does n't want to come! Who would want to come to a stupid place like that? But I don't care if he does n't. He 's got to! Is n't he engaged to you?"

"May!"

"Well, I don't care. It 's no more than fair that he should come up and help us bear it *part* of the time."

"Oh, May!" objected Sister Sue again, her face still scarlet. "As if I want any man to do anything for me he does n't want to do!"

But May only shrugged her pretty shoulders and settled herself more comfortably in her seat.

It was Gordon's turn then.

"But I thought you two were going to be married in July."

"Oh, no, not now — not at present," declared Sister Sue hurriedly, but with a very bright smile. Then, a little abruptly, she turned her attention to her father, to make sure that he was comfortable and contented.

On the whole, the journey to Gilmoreville was accomplished with less trouble than Sister Sue had feared that it would be. The shifting panorama out the window sufficiently occupied John Gilmore's attention for more than half the way. After that he dozed fitfully in his chair, and at no time did he give any sort of trouble.

Gordon read, and spent more of his time in the

smoking-car than was quite pleasing to his sister Sue. May also read for a while; but as time passed she grew restless; and, after an apprehensive glance at her father, she began to talk to her sister.

"Will anybody meet us?"

"Mr. Preston, I think. I told him to be there. I may want some help — about Father, you know."

May drew a prodigious sigh.

"I suppose we'll have to ride in that awful bus."

"I suppose we shall."

"Horrid, bumpy thing! Sue, it just seems as if I could n't do it!"

"I know it; but — we've got to do it, May. We've got to do — a lot of things, I'm afraid, that it will seem as if we could n't do."

"Have n't we got *any* money?"

"Very little. Mr. Loring's coming to see us after everything's all settled up and tell us how much we have got."

"We've got that mining stock — we three children. Is n't that worth *anything?*"

Sister Sue made a wry face.

"About two cents on a dollar, Mr. Loring says."

"Why, how perfectly horrid! What did Father buy it for, anyway?"

"I don't know, I'm sure." Sister Sue spoke a little wearily, her eyes out the window. "He thought it *was* worth something, I suppose, or would be, sometime. Mr. Loring says it may be even now. It 's possible, but not probable. So I would n't count on that if I were you."

"But what are we going to do?" demanded May.

There was no answer. Sister Sue, apparently absorbed in her own thoughts, was still looking out the window.

For another minute the younger girl fidgeted in her seat; then she began to talk again.

"What'll you wager half of Gilmoreville is n't at the station to meet us? If Granny Preston knows when we're coming, the whole town does. That's certain. And they'll come and stare, and stare, just as they do when the circus comes to town."

"*May!*" Sister Sue's attention was manifestly captured now.

"Well, they will. You know they will. We were rich; now we're poor. Something awful's the matter with Father. He looks like a man; he acts like a child. They want to see him. They want to see us. They want to find out how we take it."

"Oh, May!" remonstrated Sister Sue feebly.

"Well, they do. Funny how folks like that will stand around and gloat over anybody, is n't it?"

"Why, May, they don't gloat," disputed Sister Sue. "They will be — be sorry for — for Father, I know."

May laughed a bit tauntingly.

"You could n't say it, could you?" she challenged. "You *know* they won't be sorry for us — oh, they may be sorry for Father, in that horrid, pitying way that makes you want to shake them! But they won't be sorry for us. They'll *say* they are, of course; but all the while they'll be thinking inside of themselves:

'Ah, ha! Ah, ha! Now I guess you'll see how good it is to be poor, yourself!'"

"Oh, May, *don't!*" remonstrated Sister Sue again feebly. But May was not to be so easily silenced. With only an imperturbable shrug, she kept right on speaking:

"Can't you see Mrs. Whipple rush up to us and say, 'Oh, dear Miss Gilmore, how shocked and grieved we all are for you!' and then put up that wonderful lorgnette of hers and make sure whether it *is* our last year's suits turned and dyed? Can't you? I can! And I can see Delia Gray roll her eyes to the sky, and moan, 'Oh, you poor dear things! How are you ever going to live through it!' and then call that red-haired, homely daughter of hers away *quick*, for fear she'll look at Gordon, who 'has n't a cent now, my dear, not a cent!'"

"Oh, May, May, what a child you are!" cried Sister Sue; but she was laughing now.

May was not laughing. The fretful frown on her face carried nothing but vexation and disgust.

"Oh, of course lots of them won't say anything; they'll just stand off and stare, and not even take the trouble to look the other way, either, when we catch them at it. And the children will point their fingers at Father and whisper those things that begin with 'Do you know, they say —' And I just hate to —" There came a sharp whistle and the slowing-down of the train as they approached a station. "Why, here we are, now!" she cried, as the train drew up to the Gilmoreville station platform. "And there's Mrs.

Whipple with her lorgnette and a whole mob with her. What did I tell you? And there's Mrs. Kendall, too," she added. "Sister Sue, that *is* Mrs. Kendall, is n't it?"

There was no answer. Sister Sue was too busy getting her charge into his hat and coat to reply to any questions just then.

In a way it was as May had said that it would be. There certainly was (for Gilmoreville) a large crowd at the station; and many persons did stand back and stare with unabashed eyes that refused to turn aside. Mrs. Whipple, too, did rush up to them; and she said: "Oh, my poor dear Miss Gilmore, this has been such a shock to us!" But she did not, as far as May could see, give their suits a lorgnette scrutiny.

As for Mrs. Gray, she was not there at all. Neither did they ride home in the hated bus. Mrs. Kendall had her big seven-passenger touring car there, and she said there was room for them all. And there was.

John Gilmore behaved like the courteous gentleman that he was; and except for his obvious great weariness and his two questions as to how his mother was and why she did not come to the station to meet them, he gave no sign that he was not very much as they had been accustomed to seeing him.

Mr. Preston was there, a little frightened and nervous, but very anxious to help in every way possible. He was left in charge of the baggage, looking infinitely relieved that he was not obliged to have anything to do with Mr. John Gilmore. John Gilmore was, indeed, except for his daughter Sue's ministrations,

left almost entirely to himself. Few appeared to care to speak to him; and even Mrs. Kendall, aside from greeting him in the first place, and answering his questions concerning his mother with a stammering "I — I don't know, I'm sure," appeared not to know that he was present.

Mrs. Kendall told Sister Sue that she was glad, she was sure, that she could bring them home; and she hoped there would be many little kindnesses that she could show them in the days to come, now that they had lost their money and were so poor. Sister Sue smiled and said, "Thank you," very pleasantly, pretending not to notice that May's elbow was digging into her side with unmistakable meaning.

At the great square house with its white-pillared veranda, known as the Gilmore place, Mrs. Preston greeted them with a cheery welcome and an open fire in the living-room.

"'T was so kind of cold to-day I lit up," she explained as she ushered them into the house. "Anyhow, I knew 't would *look* good."

Mrs. Preston was a spry little old lady, seventy-five years young, with twinkling blue eyes, and a back whose uncompromising straightness hinted at a lifelong scorn of rockers and easy-chairs. There was certainly no avoidance of Mr. John Gilmore on *her* part, nor the least hesitation in her manner as she went straight to him and shook his hand heartily.

John Gilmore peered into her face a little uncertainly.

"How do you do, how do you do?" he muttered.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Preston, how do you do?" he went on more confidently. "I'm tired, very tired. I'll go up to my room, I think, as soon as I've seen Mother. Where is she, Mrs. Preston?"

Sister Sue, just behind her father, caught her breath and held it suspended, her beseeching eyes on Mrs. Preston's face. May and Gordon gasped audibly. But Mrs. Preston — Mrs. Preston never so much as changed color, and only the slightest flickering of the lids above the kindly blue eyes showed that the question was anything out of the ordinary.

"Your mother? Well, I can't jest say where she is, Mr. Gilmore. But I would n't wait for her. I'd come right up now ter your room. I've got it all slicked up for you, nice an' pretty." And still cheerily Mrs. Preston led the way from the room.

CHAPTER VI

DAYS OF ADJUSTMENT

THEY were not easy — those first days of adjustment to new conditions. Accustomed all their lives to the luxurious appointments of a house fitted out by an apparently inexhaustible purse, it was not easy to conform to the inconvenient limitations of a small-town house built before the days of electric lights and tiled bathrooms. Accustomed also to rich furnishings, harmonious colors, and fine pictures, it was not easy immediately to feel at home in rooms where hair-wreaths and framed coffin-plates were considered the acme of decorative art.

And as usual the burden of it all fell upon Sister Sue. It was Sister Sue who shamed May into a measurably serene acceptance of the loss of her daily hot water, and who laughed Gordon into learning the way to stop a kerosene lamp from smoking. It was Sister Sue, also, who bore the brunt of Katy's grumpy fault-finding about a kitchen that had no gas, no electricity, no hot water, no *anything*, Katy said, that a decent, respectable kitchen and pantry ought to have. And it was, of course, Sister Sue who attended to establishing John Gilmore in a daily routine that would not unduly tire him, but that would still keep him comparatively contented.

Then, too, there were the callers; and Sister Sue must see those. Her father certainly could not and

her sister May would not. There were the few who came out of sincere sympathy and would-be helpfulness; there were the many who came out of ill-concealed curiosity, but with loud lamentations that were even harder to bear patiently than were the semi-impertinent questions. And Sister Sue saw them all, and smiled, and looked pleasant, and said "Thank you," and that they were very kind, to be sure. And not even May knew that after they were gone Sister Sue shut herself up in her room in a helpless storm of rage and tears.

True, they knew that she often sought the piano after such calls, and they were pretty sure that never had the timid old instrument been made to voice such sentiments as it poured forth now under Sister Sue's overwrought fingers. But they were used to that, even if the piano was not. Besides, it was noticeable that less and less frequently was Sister Sue flying even to that refuge. But if May and Gordon saw this, they did not mention it, even to each other — perhaps because they were quite too busy with their own necessary adjustments to concern themselves overmuch with those of anybody else.

Then came the day when Katy packed her bag and said that she could n't stand it another day, not another minute; and that while she was very sorry to be leaving without a proper notice and all, it was too much to expect any decent, self-respecting girl to put up with what she'd had to put up with ever since she'd left the blessed city and come to this outlandish, God-forsaken country town. And she went.

And as she went, she slammed the door. It was not the first time that Katy had slammed doors and banged tin pans. Gordon had been known to say more than once that doors and tin pans were Katy's "piano" — and he always said it with a mischievous wink toward his sister Sue. And so to-day when the bang of the slammed door reverberated through the house, Gordon shrugged his shoulders and observed:

"I think I hear Katy's piano."

"But what are we going to do?" gasped May.

It was Sister Sue's shoulders that shrugged this time.

"Well, I know some things I *shan't* have to do." Sister Sue was laughing a little grimly. "I shan't have to explain and apologize every time I go into the kitchen because we have n't a certain kind of fork or spoon or kettle or frying-pan that 'everybody has who pretends to have anything'! And I shan't have to listen to constant bemoanings and bewailings because it's all so different from what it used to be — except from you two children," finished Sister Sue, a little severely.

"But, honestly, Sister Sue, what shall we do?" besought May, disdainfully ignoring the challenging insinuation of the last remark.

"Do? We'll do ourselves, of course," retorted Sister Sue briskly. "I fancy I can do — what other women do, if I have to. Maybe yet I — I'll be making a great name for myself as a cook. Who knows? Anyhow, I ought to be as smart as — Katy!" she finished in a voice that shook a little, in spite of its blithe cheeriness.

"Bully for you!" This from Gordon. "I say, Sister Sue, you make me hungry already. What are you going to give us for luncheon?"

Sister Sue wagged her head playfully.

"I don't know, sir — yet," she retorted, as she turned toward the door leading to the kitchen. "Come, May, it's up to us now."

But May held back.

"Me! Why, Sue, I don't know a thing about cooking, and you know it."

"Perhaps; but you can wash dishes," pointed out Sister Sue, still briskly; "and I'll warrant Katy left plenty of those. Come on! I hereby dub you my chief assistant."

Thus admonished, May went. But that she went crossly and unwillingly was most painfully evident.

In the kitchen Sister Sue found the soiled dishes, plenty of them. May said, indeed, that she did n't believe Katy had washed a dish since she'd been there. But she put on the apron Sister Sue brought her — a fussy little white muslin with bow-adorned pockets (one of two bought at a fair) — and she attacked the dishes with much noise if with but little skill.

Sister Sue, donning the mate to her assistant's apron — for both of which she had rushed upstairs to her bureau drawer — entered the pantry, with high head and high courage.

"I'll have chicken croquettes and creamed peas and grilled sweet potatoes for luncheon, with new apple-pie for dessert," she mused, tingling with a pleasant little excitement. "Gordon loves those.

Now where's the cookbook?" she questioned, her roving eyes searching the somewhat untidy shelves before her.

Sister Sue found the cookbook — but Gordon did not have chicken croquettes and creamed peas and grilled sweet potatoes and new apple-pie for luncheon. He had warmed up Irish potatoes (which he abhorred) and a boiled egg (which he cared little for), and a piece of stale cake for dessert.

It is a question whether Gordon was any more disappointed than Sister Sue herself was.

"I was *going* to have chicken croquettes and creamed peas and grilled sweet potatoes and a new apple-pie for your luncheon, children," she apologized ruefully, as she set the warmed-up potatoes on the table.

"Why did n't you, then?" demanded Gordon, surveying with unfriendly eyes the food before him.

Sister Sue laughed shamefacedly.

"Well, I discovered pretty quick that you have to have something besides a cookbook to make a meal like that a real success."

"What do you mean?" frowned Gordon.

"Well, little things like cooked chicken and some sweet potatoes and a can of peas, and some apples help out, you know."

"But could n't you order them?" demanded May.

Again Sister Sue laughed a bit shamefacedly.

"I was going to till I happened to remember that the man does n't come here for orders until nearly one; and we have n't any telephone, you know. I'm

beginning to understand now why Katy was always scolding about 'h'athen folks that don't have no telephone.' Of course we have missed it, all of us; but I never could see why Katy should make such a fuss about it. I do now," she finished, a little ruefully.

That many things besides a cookbook are needed in order to make a success of housekeeping, Sister Sue became increasingly aware of during those first few days after Katy went. She speedily learned that housekeeping is very decidedly more than a laundress who does n't come and a cake of toilet soap that is missing. She learned that such commodities as flour and sugar and tea and coffee and lard and butter and milk were not only frightfully expensive, but that they had an unaccountable way of giving out at the most inopportune times; and that even when every tiresome ingredient called for by that inexorable cookbook was present, there was still an occult something which she seldom seemed to have, yet without which the pies and cakes and puddings and bread and biscuits were a most dismal failure — not at all like Katy's. It began, indeed, to look very much as if she were not as smart as — Katy!

She learned, too, that bow-adorned muslin aprons are a poor protection against the extraordinary untidiness that ensues from the preparation of the simplest meal. While as for dishes — well, May said that if Katy used any more dishes than Sister Sue did just to boil a potato, she would like to know it! May was still washing dishes, though she, too, had long since discarded the twin of the muslin apron, bought

at a fair, substituting a stout blue gingham, loaned by Mrs. Preston.

Mrs. Preston! Sister Sue wondered sometimes what she would have done had it not been for Mrs. Preston. Mrs. Preston had not only lovely gingham aprons, but everything else that Sister Sue went to borrow because of lack in her own home. To Sister Sue it was really wonderful how three small rooms could contain so many helpful, absolutely necessary things that one wanted. It was wonderful how one small head — Mrs. Preston's — could contain so inexhaustible a fund of information as to just how much salt to put in, just how long things should be baked or boiled, just how to test those fearsome concoctions in the oven to see if they were done. Mrs. Preston, indeed, seemed to have at her tongue's end all that mysterious, occult something without which anything fashioned to be cooked would later run a very decided risk of being a failure. Very soon Sister Sue discovered this and availed herself of it.

And little by little Sister Sue had her reward. Her biscuits grew less soggy, her cake less heavy, her pie-crust less tough. Her meats grew more tender and her vegetables more palatable. In time, too, it ceased to take *all* her waking hours to get three meals a day and keep the house in order. She had a few minutes to spare for her father.

But it was not easy. Her feet and her back and her legs and her head ached with the strain; and many a night she was too tired to "hit the bed," she told May. She said she felt as if she were propped up on prongs

that held her a foot above the sheet. It was not a comfortable sensation.

She could not find solace or relief even in the piano, these days, for there was always a cut finger or a burned thumb to make playing a torture to her. For that matter, it had been more or less of a torture, anyway, from the very first to play on that piano, so jangling on her sensitive nerves were the tinkling notes that failed so miserably to respond to what she was longing to express. It was becoming almost impossible, therefore, to play upon it, even before the cut fingers and burned thumbs made it a physical torture as well as a mental one.

Yet if ever Sister Sue had felt the need of a piano safety-valve, it was now. She told herself sometimes that she might yet resort to Katy's piano, and slam a door or bang a pan. She felt like it. Certainly her family did not hesitate to do it. Sometimes it seemed to Sister Sue that they did not do anything but bang their doors and slam their pans. Even her father, in a gentle way, fretted a good deal at the many inconveniences of his daily living. He said that he liked Gilmoreville, oh, yes, he liked it very much, for a while; but he fancied they'd better go back to town pretty soon. Patiently, over and over again, Sister Sue would explain to him that their city home was all torn up just now, and that they would be much better off to remain where they were, for the present.

"Oh, yes, yes, I see, I see," the old man would answer with the gentle patience that had become habitual with him, and with the peering eyes that seemed

to be trying so hard to penetrate the fog that was benumbing his senses. "Well, then, we had better stay where we are, for the present — yes." And he would turn away manifestly satisfied.

And he would remain satisfied for perhaps ten minutes, for perhaps ten hours. Then again he would tell his daughter Sue that he liked Gilmoreville, oh, yes, he liked it very well; but he fancied they'd better go back to town pretty soon. And his daughter Sue would draw a long breath, and say:

"Yes, Father, but our home there is all torn up, and —" and so on through the long, patient explanation.

It was this necessity for making explanations over and over, and then over again, that made living with John Gilmore so nerve-wearing and wearisome. There was always present, too, the heartache of constant association with the tragedy of a wrecked mind in a familiar, well-loved body. But, fortunately for everybody, John Gilmore was, in the main, fairly happy and content with his picture-cutting and jackstraw-playing, and with his dearly loved puttering about the yard and garden.

May and Gordon, however, were not happy. There was never any doubt about their door-slamming and pan-banging. Gordon said it was the deadest town he ever saw; and that he'd get out of it in the fall if he had to join a circus to do it! And as for expecting a fellow to live, really live, without lights and hot water and bathrooms, and a few decent conveniences like that, it could n't be done! That's all!

You just existed! And existing was n't living, not by a long shot! As for fishing and hunting — there was n't any; and he did n't believe the town knew what a golf course or a tennis court was. How his father could have endured to spend his boyhood there he could n't conceive. And he wanted to know *why* Sister Sue had n't sold *that* place, and gone somewhere else — anywhere would have been better than there. And why did they let Katy go, too? She'd have stayed if they'd paid her more, he knew she would. As for their thinking he could eat some of those fearful and wonderful concoctions of Sister Sue's — he could n't! That 's all! And they ought not to expect him to.

All of which were a few of Gordon's "door slams."

May was not far behind him. True, May washed dishes and dusted occasionally; but she so bemoaned the cruel fate that had cast her lot in such sad lines that Sister Sue was sorely tempted sometimes to do the whole thing herself. May complained, too, that the soapy water and dust were ruining her hands, and the hot kitchen was spoiling her complexion; though she never failed to add that, of course, that did n't matter in Gilmoreville; there was n't anybody there, anyway, who would know or care whether her hands were great red paws or not or her face blistered.

May disliked Gilmoreville only one degree less than did her brother. She said that the few people there who had money were snobs; and that the patronizing airs they put on, just because a person had lost a little money, were sickening, positively sickening. And as for the rest of the people in the town — as if anybody

could honestly expect her to find a really congenial companion among Granny Preston, old lady Whittemore, and their friends!

And there was n't a thing to do, not a thing! As for her trying to write stories in a place like that, it was out of the question. Martin Kent might like such people for copy — but not she. So that was impossible! She could n't even go out to walk. She never saw such horrid weather, rain and mud — and only two sidewalks in town really fit to walk on. And as for staying at home all the time, with Father always around in that frightful condition, and you never knew *what* he was going to do, or *when* he was going to ask for folks dead and buried years ago — she just simply could not do it! That's all! And *how* Sister Sue stood it, she did not know. All is, Sister Sue must be very phlegmatic, and not at all sensitive, or she could not do it.

All of which was merely May's way of slamming doors and banging pans.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

As yet Martin Kent had not visited the Gilmores at all. He was to have come once, and the day was set by himself; but when Sister Sue wrote him that Katy had just gone and gave a very amusing account of the household under her somewhat unskilled management, he had written back at once that he could not think of adding his presence to her already overburdened shoulders; and that the last thing they should have under the circumstances was company. He added that he was glad he had the sense and considerateness to refuse, even though they were so kind as still to ask him to come. He sent a book and an expensive box of candy; and his letter to Sister Sue was very kind and affectionate.

Sister Sue reminded herself of this last very earnestly in the first flush of her disappointment that he was not coming. Not until the letter had arrived saying that he would not spend the week-end with them, after all, had she quite realized how much she had been looking forward to the little visit as a welcome break in the dead monotony of her existence. Not until she knew that she was not to see him did she remember what a lot of things she was treasuring up to tell him — funny occurrences that would make him put back his head and laugh (how she loved to hear Martin Kent laugh!), unique speeches that he might

like for copy. She wanted to ask his advice, too, about numberless matters. Most of all, she wanted somebody out of the old life just to sit down and talk with, so that she might forget, for one little minute, perhaps, that the old life was not still hers.

And when the letter came, and she knew that all these anticipated pleasures were not to be, she was disappointed and perhaps just a bit angry at first. Then is when very hastily and very earnestly she reminded herself of how affectionate and tender the letter was, and that after all he was really doing it for her good so as not to add to her burdens. She said this to May, too, when May showed great anger at the news; but May only expressed her vexation even more vehemently, and added the tart assertion:

"Well, if he was *my* lover, Sue Gilmore, and he turned down a visit to me like that, I'd know the reason why or he'd get a piece of my mind."

"Nonsense! Why, he *told* the reason, did n't he? He said he did n't want to — to add to our burdens."

"Humph! If he'd wanted to see us very badly, I fancy he would n't stop to think whether he was adding to anybody's burdens or not."

But Sister Sue said "Pshaw," and "Hush, hush," and "Nonsense," very sharply; but quickly, and with so much emphasis, that it looked almost as if she had thought of that same thing herself.

And she had. That had been one of the reasons why she had so hurriedly reminded herself that the letter was very affectionate and very lover-like. It was at times like these that Sister Sue could not help remem-

bering the promise to marry him in July which she had never been asked to renew. Not that she wanted him to ask it, of course, if he did not want to, she always assured herself hastily; but when one had once agreed to a date, it made one feel queer not to have one's lover say *something* —

At this point Sister Sue always put the thought resolutely out of her mind. There were some things, she decided, that it certainly did no good to think of. This was one; and another was what Signor Bartoni had said to her that wonderful day of the recital. It did not help her to bake beans and stir up bread to be thinking all the time of that "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!" The only great "arteest" she had any prospect of being at present had to do with flour-sifters and rolling-pins. Better to keep her mind then on the flour-sifter and the rolling-pin, she declared.

But however earnestly she thus adjured herself, and however "foolish" it might be to allow such thoughts to occupy her mind, there were times when Sister Sue found herself utterly unable to walk the strait and narrow path that led through pots and pans and kettles to her kitchen stove. In her thoughts — though they were bitterly hopeless thoughts now — she was still swaying countless thousands by the magic of her fingers, and she was still bowing her thanks to the clamorous "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore!"

All this was in her thoughts. But in her speech — in her speech there were only the pots and pans and

dustcloths of her everyday living. Sister Sue could control her tongue if not her thoughts. If it did no good, but rather harm, to *think* of joys that had been, it certainly could do even less good to talk of them. So Sister Sue laughed and joked, and made light of pies that "ran out" and cakes that burned; and merrily, many times a day she said, "Oh, well, it does n't matter!" or, "It might be a whole lot worse!" or words of like import, hoping in this way really to help the others and herself along the hard road they were traveling. And she honestly thought she was doing it.

And then came the incident of the beefsteak-pie. It was not a good pie. The meat was tough, and the crust, though light, was very yellow, with darker yellow spots like plums scattered through it. The spots did not taste at all like plums, however. They had a curious, most unpleasant flavor not unlike the flavor of the crust itself, only much worse. The top of the pie, when Sister Sue brought it to the table, displayed a beautiful golden-brown crust, and looked most appetizing. Perhaps for that reason the disappointment was all the greater when the pie was cut and served, and May and Gordon, avowedly "starved to death," took generous mouthfuls of that yellow crust, each mouthful, as it happened, splotched with a big, dark yellow "plum."

"Great Scott!" sputtered Gordon, as soon as he could clear his mouth and speak. "What are you giving us now? Did you build this with *soap?*"

At the same minute May reached for her glass of water.

"Ugh! Sue, Sister Sue!" she choked. "What *is* it?"

Sister Sue, flushing hotly, nibbled at the crust and made a wry face.

"I have n't the least idea," she sighed, with a shrug as of resignation. "Mrs. Preston told me just how to make it, and I did it."

John Gilmore, his face plainly indicative of the bad taste in his mouth, carefully poked with his fork the pie-crust to one side of his plate. He looked up as Sister Sue spoke.

"But why don't you let Katy do the cooking?" he asked, with gentle irritation, giving another poke at the offending food upon his plate.

"Katy is n't here, Father." It was perhaps already twenty times that Sister Sue had told him this; but there was only a half-suppressed sigh as she told it now for the twenty-first time.

"You bet she is n't!" corroborated Gordon meaningly, making a very great show of trying to cut a piece of meat.

"Yes, I guess we know *that* all right," chimed in May, in an aggrieved voice.

Sister Sue laughed lightly.

"Now that is n't a mite complimentary to my cooking," she pouted in mock dismay. "But, come, it might be a lot worse! The gravy's good, anyway. I'm glad of that. It'll be lovely on the baked potatoes."

"Will it, indeed? I'm glad you think so!" Gordon spoke with the sarcasm of a hungry man who has been offered a stone for bread.

But it was from May that came the avalanche.

"Glad? Of course she's glad! She's glad for everything!" stormed the girl, with sudden wrath. "She *likes* things here, Gordon! She likes the house and the town and the people in it! She likes to be without lights and gas and hot water, and no maid at all! She likes it, *likes* it!"

"Why, May!" gasped Sister Sue unbelievingly.

"Well, you do, you know you do!" retorted May. "You don't mind things here at all, and you know it. You don't mind horrid old smelly kerosene lamps, and wearing old clothes, and doing your own work. You're always laughing and saying it might be worse, and never mind! And you don't care a bit how *we're* suffering. You try to make us like it, too. Here you are even trying to make us like this old soapy pie today! But you can't do it! *We're* hungry! *We* want something to eat! And you laugh and tell us to eat the gravy on our baked potatoes; that it'll be lovely! Lovely, indeed! If you'd only show some sympathy with what *we* have to bear, we should n't mind it. We could stand things. But you don't care! You know you don't care! You like it here! You laugh, no matter what 't is, and tell us it might be worse. But I tell you it could n't be worse! Nothing could be worse than what we have here every single day of our lives — *here!*"

And with a choking sob May pushed back her chair and rushed from the room.

And Sister Sue — Sister Sue sat motionless, her eyes looking straight ahead. In her ears were ringing

May's words, "You like it here — you *like* it!" But in her ears also was ringing, like an echo, away off in the distance, "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!"

A hand plucked at her sleeve.

"Sue, Sue, Sister Sue, why don't you answer me? I said what was May talking about?"

Sister Sue turned. She gave a weary little smile.

"Nothing, Father, that you would understand — or that she understands either. Don't try to eat the crust. Let me give you some bread for that gravy," she finished, reaching for his plate.

The meal was then concluded in silence, save for the one remark from John Gilmore, apropos of nothing:

"I should think, Sue, you would have Katy do the cooking."

Sister Sue's hands shook a little when she was clearing off the table that noon. They still were not quite steady all the while she was washing the dishes and putting the kitchen in order — May did not come in to help. But Sister Sue was yet apparently very cool and calm when she ran up the back stairs at two o'clock to Mrs. Preston's rooms.

"Mrs. Preston, what is it that ails things when they're yellow, and taste awfully, like — like soap?" she demanded a little breathlessly, dropping herself into a chair.

Mrs. Preston's shrewd blue eyes twinkled as she answered:

"Sal'ratus, most likely. What is the matter now?"

"But you *told* me to use it, Mrs. Preston! You said when I used sour milk to put in saleratus. And I did."

"How much?"

"Oh, I put in enough!" cried Sister Sue quickly. "I know I did that; for after I got the dough almost mixed — it was for a beefsteak-pie-crust — I could n't remember whether I'd put in the saleratus or not. So I put in the full dose then, so's to be sure to have plenty. I knew enough not to try to be economical over *that!*" she finished, in obvious pride of well-doing.

"Oh, you did! Well, I guess you did put in — a plenty." Mrs. Preston's shoulders were shaking with poorly suppressed mirth.

Sister Sue lifted her chin a little.

"Well, what have I done now?" she demanded. "Oh, I know I've done *something*, of course!" She spoke with much bravado; but there was a tense harshness in her voice that hinted at tragedy, which should have given warning — but it did not.

"You put in just two times too much, child; an' sal'ratus ain't a thing ter stand no triflin'. Oh, I know how it looked — yaller's saffron, an' brown spots all through it that tasted —"

"I found out how they tasted," interrupted Sister Sue bitterly. The bravado was all gone now. There was left only the tragedy in her voice.

She fell silent then, her eyes moodily fixed out the window.

For a time the little old woman watched her over the tops of her glasses. Then she spoke:

"Now, listen, dearie. I just would n't let a little thing like too much sal'ratus sp'ile my life," she began soothingly.

But Sister Sue, as if stung into instant action, sprang to her feet.

"Spoil it? Why, of course not," she cried in a blithe voice, beginning to pace up and down the room. "But, then, I could n't spoil it, Mrs. Preston. You don't understand. I *like* the town and the house and the people! I like to be without lights and hot water and gas and telephones! I like kerosene lamps and old clothes! And I like beefsteak-pie that's all yellow and brown and tastes like soap!"

Sister Sue stopped for breath, but only for breath. Before the dumbfounded little woman in the big chair could speak, Sister Sue was hurrying on again, her feet still restlessly pacing up and down the room.

"And I have n't a bit of sympathy with anybody who does n't like them! I'm always laughing and singing, and saying that it does n't matter, and it might be worse, and, anyhow, we can be glad the gravy's good for the baked potatoes; and so of course I have n't any sympathy. And that's because I like it! I *like it!* I LIKE IT! And —" But Sister Sue did not finish her sentence. With a little choking sob she threw herself into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

For a few moments she sobbed on, unmolested. Mrs. Preston was still watching her over the tops of her glasses. There was no dumbfounded amazement on Mrs. Preston's face now. There were indignation

and sympathy; but there was also a shrewd look of understanding.

When the sobs had become quieter and a little less frequent, Mrs. Preston spoke:

"So that's what they've been sayin' to ye, is it, dearie — that you hain't no sympathy with 'em?"

The girl straightened up with a jerk. A dismayed look came into her eyes.

"Oh, what have I said, what have I said? ' she moaned. "Forget it! It was n't anything, really. I — I was just talking. I — I'm tired, Mrs. Preston. *Please* forget it!" And again Sister Sue sprang to her feet and began to pace up and down the room.

"Come, come, child, I ain't deaf nor blind," declared the irate little old woman, with an impatient gesture; "an' I ain't such a big fool as some folks thinks I am. Now you might just as well own up. They said it — that brother an' sister of yours. They said you did n't have no sympathy with 'em, just because you don't growl an' scold an' find fault all the time like they do."

Sister Sue wheeled agitatedly and stopped short.

"Oh, Mrs. Preston, I did n't — I never did say — that!"

"Maybe not; but I did," smiled the old woman grimly. "An' 't was true, too. You can't deny it."

Sister Sue flushed a painful scarlet.

"I know; but — that is, I mean," she stammered, " they did n't say it just like that; and — and I ought not to have said anything, anyway. They — they were just hungry, and disappointed over that pie, you

know. And, really, Mrs. Preston, it did taste awfully — that pie!"

"An' you told 'em to never mind, an' it might be worse, an' the gravy was good, anyhow. Now, did n't you?"

"Well, I — I only meant to — to help."

"An', of course, as long as you like it here so well, an' like ter cook an' wash dishes, an' —"

"Like it! *Like* it!" stormed the girl, turning suddenly and beginning her nervous pacing of the room again. "Do you suppose I *can* like it when all the time I'm thinking, thinking, of what I *want* to do — of what I might have done? And I was going to do it. I was going to do something really worth while. I was going to make them all proud of me. And I could — I know I could! I could feel it in me. And Signor Bartoni said —"

Once again she told the story. On and on she talked, feverishly, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks flushing, her whole self tingling with the joy and relief of pouring into sympathetic ears the pent-up yearnings and heart-burnings of long weeks of silence. And so vividly did she draw the picture that even the little old woman opposite, to whom music meant the church hymn-book and "The Maiden's Prayer," caught a fleeting vision of a radiant Sister Sue bowing her appreciation of a clamorous "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!"

Then for both of them came the sudden descent to earth.

"But what — what *am* I saying!" cried Sister Sue,

sinking into her chair again. "I — I did n't mean to say — all that," she sighed wearily.

"Humph!" The little old woman's eyes were very bright. "They know about this, I suppose — your brother an' sister?"

"That I wanted to become a concert pianist? Oh, yes," nodded Sister Sue, with indifferent acquiescence.

"Then what makes 'em think you like — this?"

The girl laughed a little bitterly.

"Oh, I suppose because I — I'm always telling them that we can be glad the gravy's good with the potatoes, anyway," she shrugged.

"Eh? What? That the gravy's good with the — oh, I see," chuckled Mrs. Preston, the light of sudden understanding clearing her puzzled countenance.

"It was only that I was trying to help make things easier," sighed the girl, half apologetically, with a faint smile.

"An' they wa'n't in the mood ter have things made easier that way."

"Apparently not," agreed Sister Sue; then, with spirit, she amended: "But it really does n't do any good to keep fretting over things we can't possibly help, you know."

"Maybe not. Still, I think I'd try it if I was you," suggested the little old woman imperturbably.

"You would — what?" frowned the girl.

"Try it. Try fretting. Join in — sympathize with them, you know. They *wanted* sympathy. Well,

show 'em that you do sympathize with them — that you don't like things any better than they do."

Sister Sue stared frankly, her eyes incredulous. Then suddenly she laughed. With brisk alacrity she got to her feet.

"Granny Preston, you're a dear," she chuckled. "And I'll try it, I promise." Then, over her shoulder as she whisked out of the room, she called back: "It is n't only how much saleratus to put in sour milk that you know, is it?"

Behind her she left a little straight-backed old woman who sat smiling for a long time all by herself.

Sister Sue began that same afternoon to "sympathize."

Mrs. Whipple called. Sister Sue was looking over some beans to put to soak that night when May came into the kitchen to tell her that the lady was coming up the walk.

"Oh, dear!" Sister Sue scowled, but she did not rise from her chair. She picked up another handful of beans and spread them out on her firm, rosy palm.

"What a shame! You see her, May, there's a good girl."

May fell back in amazement.

"Why, Sue, are you crazy? You know I shan't see her! I never see these people! They simply drive me crazy, and you know it!"

The doorbell jangled sharply, and with an impatient gesture Sister Sue rose to her feet.

"Yes, I know, and I don't blame you for not liking to see them. I don't, either. They're stupid, tiresome

things, most of them; and why they will insist on coming to see us, I don't understand. However, I've got to see her, of course, I suppose, since you won't." And she disappeared through the doorway, leaving behind her a girl with a slightly puzzled frown on her face.

When the caller had gone, Sister Sue went back to her beans. She looked up crossly when her sister May again entered the kitchen.

"You did n't finish my beans, I notice," she complained. "I should think 't was bad enough to see all the callers without having to come back out here and do the work besides."

Once more May fell back in obvious amazement.

"Why, Sister Sue, I — I never do — do that part of the work, and you know it!" she gasped.

"Oh, I don't blame you for not liking it," retorted Sister Sue, dropping herself down to the table and diving her hand deep into the bag of beans. "I don't like it myself. If there 's one thing in this world that 's more deadly tiresome to do than housework, I should like to know what it is. It's just cook and wash dishes and clean up, and cook and do dishes and clean up from one day's end to the other; and I hate it! *I hate it!* And —"

She did not finish her sentence, for she found herself alone. May had fled. And Sister Sue smiled.

This was only the beginning. It was really surprising how many things Sister Sue found to fret about during the rest of the day. It was too hot. The air was horrid. Her feet ached. Her head ached.

Her wrists pained her. The fire would n't burn. The lamp smoked. She hated kerosene, anyway. She never did see how anybody could cut the wick so there would n't be a horrid index finger *somewhere*. She really dreaded to go to bed. She *would* like to sleep in a decent bed once more before she died, but she never expected to. And where all the flies and mosquitoes came from, she could n't imagine. For her part she did n't see what such little pests were for, anyway. She supposed the world *could* have been made without such things in it!

And so it went. Not only did Sister Sue have these many grievances of her own to complain of, but she always joined heartily with whatever May or Gordon had to say about these annoyances. She never remonstrated with them — indeed, no. She agreed with them. She applauded them. She said she thought so, too, every time, and she never did see anything that was so perfectly horrid!

If she saw the puzzled frown and perplexed glances on the faces of her brother and sister, she gave no sign. Her own countenance was serenely non-committal, except when she was openly scolding; then it was fretful and scowling, as it would naturally be, of course.

The next morning Sister Sue was sleepy. She told the family at breakfast how she had hated to get up, and how perfectly horrid it was that they had to get up so early now. The sun was shining brightly, but she declared she knew it was going to rain before night. And when Gordon said he guessed it was going to be a pretty hot day, she said yes, indeed, it was; that

in her opinion it was going to be the hottest yet. And that people might talk all they wanted to about the city's being hot, but if it was any hotter than Gilmoreville was already — and barely July yet — she would like to know it, that's all.

Gordon did not say any more then about the weather. He turned his attention to his breakfast. There were graham rolls, soggy graham rolls, with too much salt in them. Gordon did not like them and he said so.

Sister Sue promptly agreed with him. She repeated what she had said to May the afternoon before about cooking, only adding a great deal more to it, and reiterating again how she hated it.

Gordon actually blinked a little at the vehemence of some of his sister's remarks; but he said no more about the rolls. Later, just as he was finishing, however, he did remark that he did wish there was something, *something*, in that deadest of dead towns that a fellow could do.

Sister Sue took up the matter at once with the deepest of sympathy. She said it was too bad. It was a shame. And that she certainly never saw such a forlorn place, and she hated it, too, and would give anything to get away from it. That she sympathized with him thoroughly.

At the word "sympathized" May sat suddenly erect in her chair.

"Sister Sue!" she cried accusingly. "Is *that* what you've been doing?"

"What do you mean?" In spite of herself, Sister Sue's lips twitched.

"Gordon!" May turned now to her brother. "She's been sympathizing with us; that's what she's been doing — sympathizing with us!"

"Oh, that?" Sister Sue interposed quickly, cheerfully. "Why, yes, of course that's what I've been doing. You said you wanted me to, you know — that 't would be lots easier for you if I would. And of course it's lots easier for me — to spit right out my feelings, you know; and as long as you *want* me to —"

"Want you to!" cut in two dismayed voices. Then Gordon exploded: "Well, by George, if *that*'s what you've been doing —" He stopped helplessly.

"Yes, if *that*'s what you've been doing," chimed in May; and she stopped, also.

They looked at each other, then at Sister Sue. Sister Sue's lips were still twitching. There was a moment's hesitation, then all three together they laughed.

There was nothing more said; but for at least one entire day the Gilmore family were astonishingly well content with their lot if appearances counted for anything. Even in the days that immediately followed, when the old fretful words would come back to the lips of Gordon and May — as come they most emphatically did — it needed only a demure "Well, I surely do sympathize with you, I do," from the lips of Sister Sue to bring about a prompt and significant silence accompanied, if in the case of Gordon, by a sheepish grin; if in the case of May, by a half-petulant shrug.

But it all helped. Even Gordon and May acknowledged that — to themselves. And Sister Sue knew it.

CHAPTER VIII

VISITORS AND CONSEQUENCES

It was on a hot July day that Sister Sue received the letter from Martin Kent saying that since they seemed so ardently to want to see him, he was coming, though he was still a little fearful, he said, lest his visit be a burden to them. However, he would come for the week-end, arriving Saturday at four o'clock. And of course he was eager to see them, as they would know that he must be. And he closed with a very beautiful and very tender sentiment that would have held the eyes of most girls for the lingering reading over and over of the words.

But not so Sister Sue. Sister Sue barely skimmed through the closing paragraph before she looked up with startled eyes.

"Martin is coming. He's coming Saturday," she announced hurriedly to her brother and sister. "But — I don't understand. He writes as if — if we'd been *urging* him to come, lately." Her eyes went from Gordon's face to May's. On May's they paused, their pupils dilating in startled questioning. "May, *you* did n't — say anything?"

May shrugged her shoulders daintily.

"Now, Sister Sue, don't look so shocked," she pouted. "Of course I did n't say anything — much. I just wrote him how lonesome we were."

"*May!*"

"Well, I guess I've got a right to tell my future brother-in-law how tired and worn out you are getting," bridled May, looking very superior indeed; "and that we were just stagnating in this awful place, and we'd give anything to see a *real* man once more, and —"

"Oh, May!" remonstrated Sister Sue again, falling back in her chair with a gesture of dismay.

"Well, I don't care," maintained the younger girl stoutly. "He's coming, anyhow. I don't care if you *do* scold. Besides, I should think you'd *want* to see him. I would if he were engaged to me!"

"Hush! Be still. Of course I want to see him," protested Sister Sue, "if he wants to be seen. Not otherwise. We don't want to urge — unwilling visitors, remember," she finished a little coldly, as she rose to her feet and turned to leave the room.

Martin Kent came at the appointed time on Saturday. Gordon met him at the station. They came home in the town "bus." Gordon had wanted to ask Mrs. Kendall for the car. But Sister Sue said no, indeed, no! And she had said it so emphatically that he had not liked to urge the matter. Mrs. Kendall, besides coming to the station after them on the day of their arrival, had taken them all for a ride two or three times in a somewhat stiff "Of-course-I-understand, it's-my-duty-you-know" way (according to May), and she had told Sister Sue that she would be glad to lend the car and the chauffeur to her some day for calls if she liked. But Sister Sue had never availed herself of the privilege; and she told Gordon that

nothing would induce her to ask for the car to go and meet Martin Kent.

Martin was looking well. He said he was well, though he was working very hard just now correcting proofs. The book was to come out in October. It was to be called "Trixie." He said that it was a wonderful novel. Then he laughed and apologized for being so conceited, but declared that it really was a wonderful novel, and had developed into something away beyond his expectations. He said the publishers thought very highly of it, too; and that they really had great hopes of its being a fine success.

Sister Sue said she was glad, she was sure. May clapped her hands rapturously, and declared she'd known all along it would be a success. Gordon grunted out something, an indeterminate something that might have passed for almost anything. Mr. John Gilmore was not present. He was out in the garden caring for his flowers. Mr. John Gilmore was spending a great deal of time in his garden these days, and very happily.

After Martin Kent told of his book he told of the city and their friends, most of whom had left town for the summer, he said. He talked then of the new books he had read, and the new celebrities he had met since the Gilmores had left Boston. He told them of the invitations he had had for the summer — charming places, charming people, seashore and mountains. But he said he was not going to accept any of them. He had made up his mind. He was coming up to Gilmoreville just as soon as he could —

maybe by the twentieth — and stay at the Inn. He would have a real rest then, and be near them, where he could see them every day.

May clapped her hands at this and drew an ecstatic sigh.

"Oh, Martin, you've saved our lives!" she gurgled. "It seemed as if I just could n't stand it all summer, without somebody. But now — oh, I'm so glad! Are n't we, Sister Sue?"

"Of course we are — if the gentleman thinks he can stand Gilmoreville!" There were two little red spots in Sister Sue's cheeks and an odd little sparkle to her eyes; but her lips were smiling and her voice was cheerfully cordial.

"Oh, but I think Gilmoreville is lovely, and you *know* what I think of the people in it — some of them!" Martin Kent, having exhausted the subject of himself and his own affairs, was ready now to talk of something else. "You certainly have a fine old place here."

"You would n't think so if you had to live in it," sniffed May. "No hot water, no gas, no electric lights, no *nothing!*"

"Look out!" warned Gordon. "Sister Sue'll be sympathizing with you, May."

Martin Kent looked slightly dazed.

"Sympathizing with you! Well, why should n't she?" he demanded. "*Does n't* — she?"

"Oh, yes, she does," laughed May.

"You bet she does," grinned Gordon.

Sister Sue laughed this time with them; but when

Martin Kent asked why their merriment, not one of them would tell him.

In the evening, after supper, Sister Sue and Martin Kent had an hour to themselves on the vine-shaded veranda. Martin told his fiancée how he had missed her, and how bare and empty the city was without her. He spoke very beautifully, very tenderly, and he quoted some exquisite poetry he had written especially for her. And he spoke of how blissfully happy they were going to be when they were married. He bemoaned the fact that he was so poor; but he said that when his novel was the big success it was going to be, then — He did not finish his sentence — in words; but the kiss he gave her was more eloquent than any words could have been.

The next day was Sunday. Martin Kent went to church in the morning with May and Gordon. Sister Sue had to stay at home to be with her father and to get dinner. In the afternoon May stayed with her father while Sister Sue and Martin Kent went for a walk on the hill back of the house.

They had a very beautiful walk. Sun, air, earth — each vied with the other to be at its best. Martin Kent quoted more exquisite poetry, and even composed some on the spot in celebration of the wonderful fact that they were together at last, out under God's blue sky. He talked more, too, of what they would do when they were married and of how happy they would be.

Then they went home. Sister Sue had supper to get.

THEY HAD A VERY BEAUTIFUL WALK

Early Monday morning Martin Kent went back to Boston. He said that he had had a most wonderful visit, and that he was going back to the city rested and refreshed.

Sister Sue, after he had gone, acknowledged to herself that she was neither rested nor refreshed. She had enjoyed being with him — oh, yes. And he had said many beautiful things — she admitted that. But she felt tired and curiously depressed. She laid it partly to the nerve strain of preparing meals for company with the inevitable worrying lest they be not a success, and partly to the other strain of trying to keep her father from annoying Martin Kent with his presence.

Martin Kent did not like to be with John Gilmore. He indicated that very plainly. He did not like to have John Gilmore show him his pictures or his flower-beds. And John Gilmore very plainly wanted to do just those things; which made it hard for Sister Sue. Martin Kent told Sister Sue that it was like putting a knife of torture into his heart to talk with her father and see the wreck of that magnificent mind.

Naturally Sister Sue did not want a knife of torture put into Martin Kent's heart — certainly not by anything of *hers;* so she had made every effort all through the visit to keep the two men apart. It had not been an easy task, however, for John Gilmore, for some inexplicable reason, took a very sudden and very violent fancy to Martin Kent at the outset of his visit.

It was partly because of this, therefore, Sister Sue told herself, that she was feeling so particularly tired after Martin Kent's visit. Not that she blamed Martin Kent — indeed, no! It was *not* exactly a pleasant experience to be in daily companionship with John Gilmore, as none knew better than she herself.

Sister Sue was still unrested when the telegram came from Daniel Loring. It came that afternoon, and it said that Mr. Loring would be in Gilmoreville the next day and would call upon them at ten o'clock.

Sister Sue immediately felt more depressed than ever.

"Oh, of course, I knew he was coming soon," she sighed, after telling May of the contents of the telegram. "But, some way, I've always dreaded it."

"Why?"

"Well, we'll know more, of course, then, how we stand. We'll know better — how much money we've got."

"Well, I don't see how we can be any worse off than we are now," contended May, with a pout.

Sister Sue laughed.

"Oh, yes, it might be worse, you know," she declared significantly, her eyes flashing a merry glance into her sister's face. "Anyhow, whatever it is, we've got to stand it," she said a little more soberly as she left the room.

Promptly on the minute Daniel Loring appeared the next morning. Sister Sue met him alone in the living-room. He took off his panama, applied his handkerchief to his forehead with an energy that

showed his embarrassment as he remarked that it was a warm day and that he hoped he found them well. Then, because he was a business man who used few words and who always came straight to the point, he said:

"I'm sorry, but I have n't very good news for you. There's very little left but this house. You have that, however, unencumbered. And there is a small sum which will give you income enough for the repairs and taxes, and a very little more toward living expenses, perhaps. That is all. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry that the daughter of my old friend —" He did not finish his sentence. He was blowing his nose vigorously.

"But what — are we going to do?" faltered the girl.

"Somebody will have to — to earn some money."

"But how can I? I can't leave Father; and now — there's the housework."

Mr. Loring frowned and blew his nose again.

"Are you the — the only member of your family able to work?" he demanded.

"Yes, oh, yes." She spoke with hurried decision. "You can't mean Father, of course. As for May and Gordon — why, Mr. Loring, they are just counting on school and college."

"I'm afraid they'll have to count the money first," vouchsafed the man grimly.

Sister Sue relaxed in her chair.

"But, Mr. Loring, what can I do? Of course I can play, and I can teach. I was planning to — once."

Her voice broke, then went on resolutely. "But all that is impossible now. I've given it up. I can't leave Father."

"Your — sister?"

"Must go on with her studies. I can't have her life spoiled, too. She is really very talented. She wants to write. She has written some, and has done beautifully. Mr. Kent says so. But of course she needs training. And I want her to have it. Mr. Loring, she *must* have it! I can't let her life be spoiled, like mine. She was planning on entering college this fall. As for Gordon — he has one more year where he is, and I wanted him to finish there. But it *is* an expensive school, and I suppose he could take the last year in the High School here — I understand they fit for college. But, Mr. Loring, Gordon can't — *work*."

The man gave a gesture, half impatient, half resigned.

"All right, all right, I'm not saying he can, though I've seen boys of his age — However, somebody's got to." He hesitated, then went on with obvious reluctance: "Could n't you teach *here*, then? You would n't have to leave your father to do that."

Sister Sue's worried face broke into a broad smile. Her eyes twinkled.

"Mr. Loring, I don't want to seem conceited or egotistical, but I played really adult 'show pieces' when I was ten, before I could stretch the octave. This spring Signor Bartoni told me I was capable of teaching the most advanced pupils in the Conservatory, and that for private lessons I should charge five

dollars each. Do you think Susie Smith and Nellie French, down the lane here, would want me to teach them my kind of music, or pay me the price if they did?"

"Hm; perhaps not, perhaps not," murmured the man, with a frown.

"Besides, I doubt if they'd want to take of — *me*," sighed the girl. "I don't think we're very popular here, Mr. Loring. They remember we have been rich. We're poor now. I doubt if they'd come, anyway."

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Loring, still frowning, as he fumbled for some papers in his coat. "I'm afraid I know nothing about such things, nothing. But these I do know about — and you'll have to. So if you'll kindly give me your attention," he finished, spreading one of the folded papers open for her.

When Mr. Loring had gone, some time later, Sister Sue sat for a long time thinking. To May's questions and Gordon's she made scant reply, except to say that it was rather bad and they had very little to live on. What they were to do or how they were to do it, she refused to discuss.

After the dinner was cleared away she hurried upstairs to Mrs. Preston's.

"I'm afraid you think I run to you with every problem," she apologized, a little ruefully, as she entered the room. "But you see, you seem to know everything."

"Oh, there's many that's wiser than me, an' don't

know it," bridled the little old woman, plainly not ill-pleased; "an' there's some that ain't so wise — an' don't know *that*," she chuckled. "But what is it ter-day? — somethin' ter eat or somethin' ter wear?"

"Neither one — or, rather, it's both, I suppose, really." Sister Sue dropped a little wearily into a chair. "It's money. Mrs. Preston, do you know any kind of work that I can do at home here, to earn money? Now please don't say to do sewing. You *know* how poor I am at that, from the way I've had to run to you every time I took a needle in my hand, almost. But do you know of anything I *can* do?"

Mrs. Preston sat suddenly even more erect. Her face had become alight. She had the air of one to whom has come a long-awaited joy.

"Sure I do. You can teach."

"You don't mean — music?"

"Sure I mean music! What else would I be meanin', an' you with all your studyin' an' trainin'?" She asked the question a little aggressively.

"But that's just it, Mrs. Preston, I've had too much training," sighed the girl. "There's nobody here that would want such advanced instruction or that would pay the price."

"Well, I like that!" The little old lady sat back in her chair and eyed her visitor with whimsical exasperation. "An' so because they don't want angel cakes you refuse to teach 'em how to make bread?"

"I — *what?*"

"Humph! How would you have liked it if when you come askin' me how ter stir up a tin o' biscuit,

I had told yer with my nose in the air that I never teached nothin' but weddin' cake."

Sister Sue laughed merrily.

"And am I — like that?" she demanded.

"I think you be. You *can* teach scales an' them five-finger things, could n't ye?" queried the old woman.

"Why, y-yes, I suppose so," admitted the girl doubtfully, though her eyes were still merry.

"Well, then; an' I suppose you'd take one dollar if you could n't get five, would n't ye? — 'specially if ye got enough of 'em ter more 'n make up for the five kind."

"Why, y-yes, of course," conceded the girl. "But — who would come to me for lessons?"

"Susie Smith an' Julia Small an' Nellie French an' Millie Sargent an' Charlie Burt an' —"

"But, Mrs. Preston, you speak as if you *knew*," interrupted the girl.

"I do know. They're just *waitin'* ter come when you say the word; an' at a dollar a lesson an' glad ter pay it, 'cause they feel they're gettin' somethin' special — from *you*."

"But — but —" The girl was on her feet now, her eyes shining, but incredulous.

"An' the *see*-lect men want you for the graded schools here in Gilmoreville, ter teach music in 'em; an' Mr. Spencer, down ter the Junction, he wants you one day a week when school opens there," went on Mrs. Preston calmly, ignoring the dazed exclamations of the girl across the room. "Oh, you'll have plenty ter do when you say the word," she nodded.

"But — but how can I, with the housework and all?" Sister Sue dropped back into her chair, the elation all gone from her eyes.

As if by the same signal the little old woman sat more erect again.

"My daughter Delia — her Tom's dead, now, an' left her with little Paul, so she's free — Delia, she'd like ter come an' do yer work fer ye, an' she'd do it cheap, too, if you'd be willin' ter let the baby play out in the back yard here. An' she could help *me* some, spare time, I know. I need her, too. I ain't so young as I was once. So her pay would n't be so high fer you, an' she'd more 'n save her wages, anyway (compared ter *your* way of doin' things!), usin' up odds an' ends an' cookin' economical."

Sister Sue was sitting forward now with her eyes frankly staring.

"But, Mrs. Preston, you sound as if — if you'd got this all arranged beforehand!"

"I have. They come ter me first fer the lessons, askin' if you would give 'em, I mean; then I thought up the rest, about Delia an' her workin' here. I knew you'd have ter have some one, with all that ter do."

"But why have n't you said anything to me of all this?"

"I was waitin'."

"Waiting!"

"Yes; till you come ter yer senses. I knew some day you'd see how foolish you was to bury your light under a bushel basket like this. An' I knew you'd want some money, too. An', besides, I suspected

sometime you'd get tired of — of eatin' bread with that gravy."

"Bread? — gravy?" frowned Sister Sue.

The little old woman nodded her head, her shrewd eyes twinkling.

"Yes. I suspected some day you'd be wantin' somebody else ter make yer beefsteak-pies fer ye, so you could eat the crust."

"Oh!" laughed Sister Sue. "Oh, ho!" Then she pouted with a playful grimace: "I can cook better than that now; indeed I can, Mrs. Preston!"

"I don't doubt it. But there ain't much money in it, just the same, is there? Well, there is in my plan. An' this minute there's at least eight all ready, with the dollar right in their fists, waitin'. An' I don't know how much the schools 'll pay."

Sister Sue clapped her hands and drew a long breath quite after the fashion of her sister May.

"And you planned this all out. You've been planning it all this time, and never let me know!"

"Yes." The little old woman's eyes sparkled with an excitement almost as great as was the girl's. "Susie Smith's mother came first. She asked did I s'pose you would teach Susie. She did n't like to ask you herself. An' she told me that Nellie wanted to an' Julia Small, also. That gave me the idea. But I said wait. I told 'em ter say nothin' ter no one. An' so we waited. I knew the time would come, just as it has ter-day, when you'd want ter be earnin' some money."

"Susie Smith, Nellie French, and Julia Small,"

murmured Sister Sue just above her breath. "But, oh, Mrs. Preston, to think of teaching scales and five-finger exercises to Susie Smith and Nellie French!" Sister Sue shivered a little.

"Oh, I'll own up, weddin' cake looks prettier an' makes more show than — than biscuits," observed Mrs. Preston, with a sidewise glance.

"What? Oh!" The girl laughed and colored a little. "I understand. It does sound foolish to you, Mrs. Preston; but, you see, when I think what I was *going* to do—" Her voice was not quite steady. "It is n't easy, you know, to — to sit in the kitchen and peel potatoes for the big banquet when you'd been expecting to sit at the head table and carve the turkey."

Mrs. Preston chuckled.

"Humph! Maybe. Still I'm thinkin' that potatoes is just as necessary ter that 'ere banquet as the turkey is. An', anyhow, don't everybody have ter learn them scales an' things 'fore they can play grand show pieces?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Kind of a — a foundation for them show pieces, ain't it?"

"Why, y-yes."

"Well!" the little old lady's voice grew triumphant. "Then I'm thinkin' that them foundations is the most important things there is. How long do you s'pose that 'ere cupelo on top Mis' Kendall's house up there would stay put if there wa'n't a good cellar wall underneath it? Eh? Tell me that!"

Sister Sue laughed and sprang to her feet.

"Granny Preston, you're a dear! And you do know a whole lot of things besides how much salt and soda to use! You're a wonder! You'll have me *wanting* to — to peel those potatoes, yet!" And she whisked out of the room to tell May and Gordon that she was going to teach the whole town, schools included; and that May could go to college and Gordon back to his school; and that Mrs. Preston's daughter was coming to make real beefsteak-pies for them that they could eat — crust and all!

Later she went back to Mrs. Preston's to make plans soberly and in order. Mrs. Preston might tell the mothers of the children that she would be glad to teach their sons and daughters, and that they might come right away to make arrangements. Meanwhile she would see about hiring a piano. She could not teach on that one, of course. She would also see about having a telephone put in. That would be a necessity now, of course.

CHAPTER IX

FOUNDATIONS

By the twentieth of July, when Martin Kent arrived at the Inn, Sister Sue's class was well established; and it was known as "Sister Sue's class," too. Sometimes the children forgot and even addressed her as "Miss Sister Sue," much to Sister Sue's amusement and their own blushing confusion. Sister Sue herself should have become accustomed to this title by this time, for so in the habit was her family of speaking, not only to her, but of her, as "Sister Sue," that others fell naturally into the way of it also. Gilmoreville had always known her as "Sister Sue," for from babyhood May and Gordon had answered most questions with "I don't know. Sister Sue'll tell you. She knows." Gilmoreville now, therefore, was taking lessons of, not Miss Susanna Gilmore, but Sister Sue.

Martin Kent did not like Sister Sue's class in pianoforte playing. He found that out very soon. He had not been there a week before he said so to his fiancée.

"I don't get a minute, hardly, to see you — not a minute, only evenings," he complained.

"I know it. But, Martin, I have to. Don't you see? And only think of all the money I'm earning — peeling those potatoes."

"Doing — *what?*"

Sister Sue laughed and told the story of her inter-

view with Mrs. Preston — a story which Martin Kent chuckled over and thoroughly appreciated.

"She's a character and no mistake," he nodded. "But I notice it was *you* who likened your work to peeling potatoes for that banquet."

"It was. I did." She smiled, but she sighed, too. "And it *is* peeling potatoes, Martin, and that kitchen is mighty stupid and lonesome when you can't help thinking all the time of the banquet-hall with all its light and laughter and music and excitement! You see, the children — Martin, they are awful. Why, they don't know a scale from an octave, some of them! And it is so hard to hear them singsong their one-two-three, one-two-three, when — when — oh, I do so want to be carving that turkey!"

"And that's what you should be doing."

"Oh, but you forget those foundations," she reminded him with a shrug. "And, of course, they *are* necessary; only I — I happen to be one that would prefer to build the cupolas."

"I don't blame you! It's a shame!" he declared. "But you just wait till my book gets to going. We won't be — er — peeling potatoes then."

She laughed and colored again.

"But meanwhile I am earning money," she said. "I want May to go on with her studies. Gordon — we've decided not to try to send him back to his old school. He'll stay and graduate here. Gilmoreville has a very fine High School, I am told. After that, we'll see. I'm hoping for college. But May — May must go, that's all. You *know* what talent she's got."

"Yes, I know, and I'm going to help her this summer. We were talking this morning while you were laboring with that little Smith girl. May read me that last little story she's written. It's very good."

"Is it really? Oh, I'm so glad! It seemed good — to me."

"Yes. Oh, it needs pruning and condensing, and she has some bad habits that need correction. And, as I said, I'm going to try to help her this summer. We're planning to have a session every morning on the piazza — 'First Aid to Short-Story Writing,' while you're teaching."

"Oh, Martin, how perfectly splendid! That's awfully good of you. And it'll help her so much."

"She seems to think so."

"Of course it will. I hope she appreciates it. And for you to take your time like that, and for a tyro like May! Oh, well," — she smiled whimsically, — "*you'll* be peeling potatoes now, Martin!"

Martin Kent shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps. Still, it is n't proved yet, you know, that I — I could carve the turkey if I wanted to. But you just wait till 'Trixie' is out. You wait!"

"Oh, we're waiting," she retorted a bit saucily. Then, with sweet gravity, she added: "But I do think it's dear of you, Martin, to help May; and I love you for it."

"I'm glad you love me for something, you little will-o'-the-wisp," he sighed plaintively. "Do you know what's going to happen? Some day I'm going to bunch the whole dozen of those tiresome one-two-

three-fourers, and dump them into the river. Then while they're scrambling out and drying themselves off, I'll see if *I* can have you a little while to myself!"

"But you do have me evenings and Sundays, and some of the time days," she protested with a merry laugh.

"Oh, yes, some of the time days — when you're eating your dinner, for instance."

"Well, anyhow, they're better dinners than they used to be — those you've tried. Now, aren't they?" she challenged.

"Do you expect me to say that, and to the former cook? Not much!" he fenced.

"Well, perhaps it wouldn't be quite safe," she smiled. "But we do think Delia's a splendid cook. And she's such a comfort in lots of ways! Oh, things are beautifully fixed up now."

Things did, indeed, seem to be "beautifully fixed up" at the Gilmores' those July days. Delia, in the kitchen, gave them good, nourishing food at a fraction of what the inexperienced Sister Sue had been spending for the table. Moreover, the wages she asked were not large. Did she not have much time to give to her mother, and was not little Paul allowed the glorious freedom of that wonderful back yard?

John Gilmore was better physically than he had been at all since the catastrophe. Mentally he was unchanged. He still found his chief delight in his picture-cutting and his jackstraw-playing, though just now his garden was running a close second in his favor, and he was spending more and more of the

long hours digging and weeding and watering, all of which pleased and relieved Sister Sue very much; when he was in the garden she felt that he was safe and happy. More than that, she knew that he was not annoying Martin Kent, or any one else, with his gently insistent questions.

Gordon was away camping. A school friend (supplemented by the mother) had sent him an invitation; and Sister Sue, upon investigation, had given cordial consent.

May was much less fretful these days. With college a possible prospect, her present surroundings seemed more endurable; besides, since Martin Kent had come there was the wonderful inspiration of his encouraging assistance in her short-story writing. He usually gave up the entire forenoon to her now, greatly to her joy and appreciation. Rainy days they sat behind the screen of vines on the veranda; but on pleasant days they nearly always went up into the grove on the hill back of the house, or over to "Sunset Rock" on Flanders Hill — anywhere, so as to get away from the tiresome tum-tum-tum, tum-tum-tum of those lessons through the parlor windows.

As for Sister Sue herself — Sister Sue, too, was happier than she had been since the day her father was brought home unconscious; happier not only because the members of her family were obviously more contented, but happier on her own account. Disagreeable and tedious though her work was at times, it was yet growing in interest. She found herself eagerly watching for improvement in her young pu-

pils, and very proud and gratified when she found it. Besides, there were coming to her now regularly three or four older girls from a neighboring town, and Annabelle Whipple, of Gilmoreville. These girls were more advanced, and two of them had real talent. Sister Sue was finding keen pleasure in the hours spent with them.

With it all she was very busy. The number of her pupils was increasing rapidly, and she was learning to fit them in, one after another, with no lost time between. The money that came in Sister Sue counted greedily, questioning always, was there going to be enough to send May to her beloved college? She had her fears. And yet Mr. Loring had said that there would be partly enough to live on, anyway, and if they were very economical —

But Sister Sue did not let her mind dwell on this. She would work, and work hard. She would procure all the pupils she could, and there were the schools in the autumn, besides.

In spite of her increasing number of pupils, Sister Sue always found time to see that her father was contented and well cared for. That he was so well physically made her burdens in this direction much lighter. Now that Martin Kent had come there was a new claimant for her time, one that refused to be denied and whom she did not wish to deny. It was very pleasant, after the long day of teaching, to be soothed and comforted and coddled a little, perhaps, until she was rested. It was very delightful to sit on the veranda through the long July twilights and talk, or

sit quietly, as the mood willed, with a companion whose sympathy was so nicely attuned that it made no difference which she did. Martin Kent was really a comfort these days. He was tender, tactful, and sympathetic, full of fun and good cheer, with always something interesting to say. It was a particularly restful companionship after a long day of jangling discords and nerve-wearing "No, no, that is not right. It should be, 'One-two-three-four; one-two-three-four; one-two-three-four.'"

And there was still her piano. She had a good one now. True, it was a rented instrument, and it was not an expensive one; but it was in good tune and of fairly good tone. At all events, it was much better than the "tinkling cymbal" now remaining closed and silent below the framed coffin-plate in the corner across the room; and it responded with some measure of satisfaction to the mood that was on her.

And this — as well as all the rest — helped.

CHAPTER X

OLD HOME WEEK

GILMOREVILLE was to have an Old Home Week, beginning the last Monday in August. Mrs. French, the Chairman of the Committee for Making Our Old Home Week a Big Success, called upon Sister Sue early in the month to ask a great favor, as she termed it.

She said that they were to have an entertainment in a huge tent on the Common the third day for the double object of celebrating Old Home Week and of procuring funds for their new town building so greatly needed. She came to ask if Sister Sue would be so good as to play one of her "prettiest pieces"; and would also the young man at the Inn, Mr. Kent, she believed his name was, read a story. She understood that he wrote them.

Sister Sue smiled; but she looked over her shoulder a bit furtively to make sure that the young gentleman at the Inn named Kent was not within hearing distance. Then she asked Mrs. French to tell her a little more about the affair.

Mrs. French was very glad to do this. She was having really a perfectly awful job, she said, and the next time they wanted a chairman for any of their old committees they might look somewhere else. *She* should n't take it. That was sure. But she was in it now, and she'd got to go through with it, of course.

"But just what is it that you're trying to do?" asked Sister Sue.

"Well, first, of course, we're trying to make Old Home Week a Big Success. We're trying to get everybody back here. And, really, we have some very celebrated people, you know, who used to live here: Cy Bellows, the ball-player, and Miss Kate Farnum, the novelist, and Viola Sanderson. She sings, you know — in Grand Opera, too, I think, in New York, and everywhere. And Mrs. Kendall's boy; you know he's a perfectly wonderful violinist. Well, we've written them to come. And of course we've written all the others, too — everybody who used to live here. You folks would have got a letter if you had n't already come here," she beamed.

"Thank you," smiled Sister Sue, trying to banish from her thoughts the quick vision of her father as he used to be.

"Then, of course, we had to think how to celebrate, specially Wednesday — that's going to be our big day. Some wanted speeches. Some wanted just to feed 'em with banquets. The men wanted to get up a ball-game to amuse 'em; and some of the women thought a sale would be nicest. You see, we wanted to make some money for the new town hall if we could. The young folks, they wanted a dance, of course. You can imagine it was an awful mess. Nobody wanted the same thing, and some of us, who were wiser, knew we'd got to be careful what we did have, or else the Kendalls and Whipples and all that set would n't come near it."

She paused for breath, and Sister Sue murmured a sympathetic "You must be tired, indeed."

"I should say I was! Well, we talked it over, and we finally decided. We'd have a big tent on the Common, and we'd have a banquet at noon. Old Homers — the folks from out of town, you know, that used to live here — need n't pay anything. The rest of us — folks that live here, and just sight-seers from other towns — we'd pay thirty-five cents a head. Some said a quarter; but we're going to give 'em a pretty good feed, and I held out for the thirty-five. In the evening we'll all have a dance — in the same tent, of course. And in the afternoon we'll have a show and charge admission — twenty-five cents. That's when we want you and the young gentleman from the Inn. And we did think maybe of having my Nellie and some of the rest of your music-scholars play. But I don't know as *that* would be a good idea. Of course, we could n't ask 'em all, and that would make the others mad. So probably that would n't do. Better stick to you and Mr. Kent, and maybe the church choirs to sing."

Through the window came the sound of Martin Kent's voice on the veranda, and again Sister Sue looked fearfully over her shoulder in his direction. Then she turned toward her visitor.

"Mrs. French, while you've been talking I've been thinking," she began briskly; "and I've got an idea."

Mrs. French fell back in her chair.

"My land, Sister Sue! I beg your pardon, I'm sure, and no offense meant, Miss — Miss Gilmore,

but we always think of you as Sister Sue," she corrected herself a little breathlessly. "But, please, *please* don't suggest anything else! We've thrashed out *every*thing; and I worked a whole hour last night to get them settled down on this."

"Oh, but I'm not going to suggest anything else," calmed Sister Sue hurriedly. "It's only a little addition that I want to suggest to *your* plans. Why, Mrs. French, you've got the chance of a lifetime right in your fingers. Did n't you know that?"

"What do you mean?" Mrs. French's voice and manner were still doubtful, still a bit aggressive.

"You want your special Old Home Day to be a big, big success, don't you?"

"We do."

"And you want very much to get some money. Is n't that so?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" spoken with great fervor.

"Well, then, listen!" Sister Sue was all excitement now. "You can make it the biggest kind of a day this town, or any other town anywhere around here, ever had; and you can get lots of money, besides."

"My land! How?"

"Write to your ball-player and opera-singer and novelist and violinist, and tell them that Gilmoreville wants an Old Home Day that will make the whole State — yes, the whole country — sit up and take notice; and that you can do it if they will come back home for the day and give to their old home folks a few hours of their time and their talent, and let Gilmoreville show how proud it is of its illustrious

sons and daughters, and let the outside world realize what it owes to Gilmoreville."

"My, don't that sound just grand!" breathed Mrs. French.

"Then tell them what you want. Tell them you are going to have a big tent, and you want Viola Sanderson to sing, and Miss Farnum to read one of her stories, and Mr. Kendall to play his violin. And tell the ball-player that you are going to have a ball-game, and if he will only come and pitch for you the town of Gilmoreville won't be able to hold the multitudes that will pour in from the whole country around."

"My land's sake!" ejaculated Mrs. French, her eyes almost popping from her head.

"Now is where the money comes in," went on Sister Sue, showing scarcely less excitement. "With Cy Bellows for your ball-game, and with Viola Sanderson, Kate Farnum, and Donald Kendall for your entertainment, you can charge any old price you want, and they'll pay it and be glad to. And they'll come from miles and miles around, for of course you'll advertise it. With such drawing cards as you've got, you won't have to worry about anything except how you're going to take care of the crowds when they get here."

Mrs. French drew a long breath of ecstasy.

"My! But will they do it — Mr. Kendall, and them others? Will they come and play and sing and read, and all that? Of course we could pay 'em."

Sister Sue smiled. Her lips twitched.

"I doubt it — and you would if you knew the prices they're in the habit of receiving. But I think they'll come if possible. I'm sure they will if you put it up to them right — appeal to their patriotism and their love for the old home town that gave them birth. Tell them how proud Gilmoreville is of them. And don't deceive them. Let them know what their presence is going to mean from a money point of view. Tell them frankly that, in addition to all the sentiment and glory of the occasion, they can, by coming, do a real and lasting service to the old home town by enabling you to raise the money for the much-needed town building."

"Oh, my, if we only could!" breathed Mrs. French.

"But you can! I'm sure you can!"

"*We* could n't. We'd never be able to write 'em so they'd come. Oh, Miss — Miss Gilmore, *you* do it, please do it. You will write 'em, won't you? Honestly, we'd make an awful mess of it if we tried to. You will do it?" she pleaded.

"Why, y-yes, I'll do it," promised Sister Sue, after a moment's hesitation. "But we must do it right away, at once. We have n't quite three weeks as it is. You 'll have to get the names and addresses for me."

"I will. I'll go straight now and get them!" cried Mrs. French, springing to her feet. "And I'll send Nellie right back with them, so you can write to-night. And, oh —" she turned when almost at the door — "of course you'll play, too, and — and the young gentleman at the Inn will read?" The intonation of her voice made it a question.

Sister Sue shook her head.

"You would n't want Mr. Kent, anyway; he was n't born in Gilmoreville. I was, I know, but I — I'm not a celebrity. I'm only the music-teacher that teaches the children down at the village. That would look pretty on your programme with Viola Sanderson and Donald Kendall, would n't it? And when people asked, 'Who's that?' and you had to tell them the truth! Nonsense! Of course I shan't play." Her voice was not quite steady, but she laughed lightly, and her eyes were very bright as Mrs. French held out her hand in good-bye.

"But you'll write those letters! You'll do that part!" cried Mrs. French. "And, oh, thank you so much, Sister Sue, for giving us such a splendid idea. You wait till I tell the rest!" And she hurried away without even a suggestion of an apology for that "Sister Sue."

But the Chairman of the Committee for Making Our Old Home Week a Big Success did not know that she had said "Sister Sue." For that matter, neither did Sister Sue herself know it. Sister Sue, once alone, had gone straight to the piano. The next minute runs and trills and crashing chords told (had one but known) that Sister Sue was trying to fill her ears with something other than certain clamorous calls of "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!"

Sister Sue went out on to the veranda then and sat with May and Martin Kent till Nellie French appeared with the promised names and addresses; then she excused herself and went to her room to

write the letters upon which hung so many hopes. With all the skill and tact and persuasion at her command, she made known what those hopes were; and begged for an early reply.

The letters finished, she took them downstairs to the veranda where Martin Kent was waiting to mail them for her.

"Well, it did n't take you long!" exclaimed May.

"Oh, they were short and sweet and straight to the point," laughed Sister Sue, "and of course they were all pretty nearly alike. But they 're gems of the first water, I can assure you. Listen!" And in the light that came through the living-room window she took one of the letters from its envelope and read it aloud.

"Bravo!" applauded Martin Kent. "That would move the heart of a stone."

"Perhaps. But that 's not saying they 'll move the hearts of those celebrated pets of fortune," shrugged Sister Sue.

"Only think of having Cy Bellows and Donald Kendall right here in town with us!" gurgled May.

"Donald Kendall would be flattered that you included him with Cy Bellows, I am sure," observed Martin Kent dryly.

May sniffed her disdain.

"If Donald Kendall is anything like what he used to be, you *could n't* flatter him!" she declared. "Of all the conceited creatures! And domineering! You could n't say your soul was your own in his presence and be sure to get away with it, even then."

"When was that?"

"Eight or ten years ago. Oh, he could play then. He was wonderful."

"How old was he?"

"Eighteen. I was eight and Sister Sue ten; and we were his abject slaves, when he'd let us be. Most of the time, though, he just tormented us. He was an awful tease. But it will be exciting to see him again, though. And he's so wonderfully famous now!"

"I want to hear him play," said Sister Sue dreamily. "Young as I was, I'd sit by the hour then and listen to him if he'd let me. But he would n't let me very often. He preferred to make hideous noises, and scrape the bow across the strings in weird shrieks and groans and cat-calls that sent us flying with our hands to our ears."

"Well, he can play now all right." Martin Kent's lips came together a bit grimly.

"You've heard him, I think you said."

"In New York a year ago — yes. He's wonderful."

"What does he look like?" This from May.

"Very much like a man who could be just such a boy as you describe," laughed Martin Kent. "He's tall, dark, rather piercing black eyes, a mouth not too accustomed to smiling, and a temper and a disposition that showed up very plainly, even that night, right there."

"You don't mean during the concert!" Sister Sue's eyes were incredulous.

"Yes. On the stage. He had an encore, and came out to respond. His accompanist came out, too, and was just arranging the music on the rack at the piano,

when Kendall wheeled, walked over to the piano, said a sharp word or two, then came back to the front of the stage and waited till the pianist, very red of face, got up from the piano and disappeared. When everything was quiet, Kendall raised his violin and played two or three old airs entirely unaccompanied. I heard afterwards what happened. He was n't suited with his accompanist. Even I noticed that he turned to him once or twice, during the playing, as if greatly annoyed. When it came to the encore — something that had been previously provided for — he walked over and told the young fellow his services would not be required."

"How nice!" tittered May.

"That poor accompanist!" frowned Sister Sue. "But I can imagine Donald Kendall's — doing just that."

"I wonder if he'll come." May's voice was half fearful, half longing.

"I wonder if any of them will come," sighed Sister Sue, balancing the letters in her hand. "I'm beginning to get scared, now that the deed is done."

"Oh, it is n't quite done," Martin Kent reminded her. "The letters are n't mailed yet."

"No, but they will be to-night, for I shall give them to you when you go, of course. I'm not going to stop *now*, you may be sure, after all this!"

"If the rest of the celebrities are as sweet-tempered as Donald Kendall, we'll have some excitement, anyhow," commented May. "Really, I'm getting quite worked-up over this Old Home Day," she laughed as she got to her feet. "And now I'll

leave you and let you two visit together. Poor Martin! He has n't had you a minute to-day. I'd rebel if I were in his place," she tossed over her shoulder as she disappeared through the doorway.

Martin Kent posted the letters that night. Then came the days of waiting for the answers. The whole town was on the *qui vive*. Even Sister May Superior (as Martin Kent sometimes called May Gilmore) asked every day if Sister Sue had heard anything; and Martin himself was not far behind her.

Mrs. French telephoned daily. Nor was she the only one. Sister Sue, indeed, for the first time since installing the instrument almost wished for the old telephoneless days, so constantly was she summoned to answer the query: "Have you heard anything yet, Miss Sister Sue?"

After all, they had not very long to wait. The first reply came from Donald Kendall, and it came through his mother.

Mrs. Kendall walked over to the house one afternoon at about five o'clock. Mrs. Kendall did not often come to the Gilmores'. She had called once, and Sister Sue had properly returned the visit. Since then she had not come to the house except to take them for a ride or two in the motor car. May was wont to say that Mrs. Kendall had "duty" written large all over her when she noticed them in any way. May declared that her very air said: "Whereas these persons were rich, but are now poor, it is my duty to show them that it makes no difference in my treatment of them, no difference whatever."

"And when she used to just toady to us, and be so pleased if we'd even notice her!" May would finish wrathfully.

To-day Mrs. Kendall was coldly gracious, with a tinge of patronage in her manner as Sister Sue greeted her.

"My son writes me that he has received a letter from a Susanna Gilmore requesting him to play at the Gilmoreville Old Home Day," she began with a faint smile.

"Yes, I wrote him — in behalf of the Committee." Sister Sue also spoke with a faint smile.

Mrs. Kendall stirred in her chair.

"But I wonder if you — I mean if the Committee understands what — what my son usually receives for a single appearance at a concert."

"Perhaps not — until I told them," returned Sister Sue imperturbably, still with the little quiet smile on her lips. "We understand, of course, that it would be impossible for Mr. Kendall to acquire any financial benefit from an appearance in Gilmoreville. But — we were venturesome enough to hope that he still might like to come."

"He will come." Mrs. Kendall bowed graciously. Plainly she had been only trying to make Gilmoreville realize the magnitude of the favor being done them. "He says he will be very glad to come. He will play two numbers, and he will bring his own accompanist." (Mrs. Kendall wondered a little at the sudden broad smile that came to Miss Sue Gilmore's face, but she went on with what she had to say.) "My

son asks me to tell you that he is coming. So if you will consider this an official notice, please."

"Thank you. I shall be glad to pass on the information," bowed Sister Sue. "The Committee will be gratified, I am sure."

"He may come a day or two early. He was planning to make me a visit at about this time, anyway."

"I see."

For a few minutes longer Mrs. Kendall chatted of one thing and another, but she spoke no more of her son. She asked Sister Sue how she enjoyed teaching, and if she did not find that it tried her — so confining, and in warm weather, too! It was such a pity that she had to do it. She inquired for the health of the family, mentioning in particular poor dear Mr. Gilmore. Then, a little later, she took her very gracious leave.

Sister Sue went to the piano and played for quite ten minutes; then very quietly she went out to the veranda and told May that Donald Kendall was coming. She gave the same piece of information to Mrs. French over the telephone. After that it was not necessary to tell any one; though she still had to say, "Yes, it is fine that he is coming, is n't it?" to no less than five others who called her up before the next morning.

A day later came a letter from Kate Farnum's secretary saying that Miss Farnum would be pleased to come to Gilmoreville as requested, and would be willing to donate her services to the extent of a thirty-minute reading from her latest novel, provided that

the management would agree that the doors of the assembly room should be closed during the reading and no one admitted for that period of thirty minutes.

Close upon the heels of this epistle came a letter from Viola Sanderson, written in her own sprawling hand. She said that she thought it was perfectly lovely for Gilmoreville to plan such a delightful reunion of all the old home folks, and she was anticipating the occasion very much and would n't miss it for the world. Then she signed the name known from one end of the continent to the other (to say nothing of Paris, London, and Berlin) as that of the greatest coloratura soprano of the day.

As if in afterthought came the P.S.:

"Sing? Bless your heart, of course I'll sing for you — all you want me to!"

"And she's the biggest, the very biggest of the whole bunch!" cried May, when Sister Sue, as usual, had read the letter to her and Martin Kent on the veranda. "And yet look how little she makes of what she is doing for us!"

"Quite apt to be the way, from my experience," commented Martin Kent, reaching for the letter and critically examining the handwriting. "The bigger they are, the more simple and unassuming. And the lady writes the whole letter herself, if you please, in her own hand. That's some letter for an autograph collector, Sue!"

"Well, an autograph collector is n't going to get it." And Sister Sue reached for the letter as if already fearful of its escape.

"And look at Kate Farnum, with her stiff little note from her secretary!" scoffed May; "laying down the law about doors being shut and no admissions during the reading. As if anybody cared whether they heard her little two-for-a-cent novel, or not!"

"Jealousy — professional jealousy!" gibed Martin Kent with merry eyes.

May shrugged her shoulders.

"Sister Sue, it is so, — what I said, — is n't it?" she appealed.

But Sister Sue turned away with a laugh.

"Settle your own disputes," she said. "I've got to go and tell Mrs. French the latest. How pleased they will be!"

"You have n't heard from Cy Bellows yet?" called out May.

"No, but you will," declared Martin Kent without hesitation.

And Martin Kent was right. Before night there came a telegram reading:

Great! Sure I'll come.
Cy Bellows.

"And now we've heard from them all, and they're all coming," triumphed Sister Sue. "Why, May, I'm getting to be real excited myself; I really am."

But she had to draw the line that evening when Mrs. French, red-faced and flustered, ran over to "talk things up."

"And, oh, ain't it splendid and perfectly wonderful?" breathed Mrs. French, dropping herself into a

chair. "Only think of having Viola Sanderson and Mr. Kendall and — on our programme! Why, they say she has sung before Kings and Queens and Princesses, and the idea of her singing for us, right here in Gilmoreville! And it's all owin' to you — every bit of it. We would n't have had anybody but you an' Mr. — oh, Miss Sister Sue," she broke off, growing even more red of face, "I beg your pardon! Excuse me! That was awful! I — I did n't mean it — to sound like that. Of course we *wanted* you — that is, we'd be glad *now* to have —"

But Sister Sue interrupted her with a quickly upraised hand.

"Yes, yes, I know; I understand," she nodded with a smile. "But never mind about that. Just think of what we're going to have now. Besides, the work has just begun, the real work."

"Yes, of course, I suppose it has," sighed Mrs. French, settling back in her chair. "Well, what shall we do first?"

"I can't do anything. I have n't the time, really, Mrs. French."

"But, Sister Sue, you'll advise us!" cried Mrs. French, sitting up, aghast. "I mean, Miss — Miss Gilmore," she stammered.

"Let it go at 'Sister Sue.' That's what I am." There was an odd something in the girl's voice that vaguely disturbed Mrs. French. But instantly she forgot it under the sway of the brisk cheeriness of Sister Sue's next sentence. "Advice? Oh, yes, I'll give you lots of advice, if you want it," she was say-

ing. "And I can put it in just one word: *Advertise.* Advertise everywhere — town, county, the whole State. Tell everybody what you are going to have here on that last Wednesday in August. Then get busy, all of you, to prepare for the crowd that will surely come."

"We will, we will!" exclaimed Mrs. French eagerly. "And folks are interested already. The Kendalls, and Whipples, and Grays, and all that set — they're coming, and the Kendalls are going to have folks from Boston and New York — a house-party. And Mrs. Sargent telephoned yesterday to know if we were going to have boxes in the tent; and if we were, she wanted us to reserve the best one for her. She wanted to give a box-party, she said. Oh, I think it's wonderful, perfectly wonderful! And we owe every bit of it to you!"

"Then pay me back by making the whole thing one big glorious success," smiled Sister Sue as she bowed her visitor out.

And when Mrs. French had gone, once more to the piano went Sister Sue to fill her ears with something other than that clamorous "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!"

For the next two weeks little was done or thought of in Gilmoreville but what had to do with Old Home Week. Even the children, whose lips still droned one-two-three, one-two-three, at Sister Sue's piano, showed so plainly where their minds were, that their much-tried music-teacher sometimes declared to her family that she might as well have given up her

entire time to the project, for all the good her lessons were doing. Even as it was, her telephone was kept not a little busy by Mrs. French's excited voice announcing as a preface to an always lengthy talk:

"Well, I want to tell you what we're doing *now!*"

Sister Sue knew, therefore, the most of what was being done.

It was arranged that Miss Kate Farnum should stay at the Inn. Nobody seemed anxious to undertake her entertainment after being shown the secretary's letter. Mr. Donald Kendall, of course, would stay at his mother's. At least five homes had been thrown wide open to Cy Bellows, with their owners begging for the privilege of entertaining him. After anxious deliberation the Committee chose the first one offered as the safest way out of that dilemma.

There remained, then, only Miss Viola Sanderson. Here there entered complications. Mrs. Jane Jones, an aunt of the singer, lived in a little white house on a side street, and she notified the Chairman of the Committee for Making Our Old Home Week a Big Success that she would be very glad to entertain her niece. This created some little consternation of itself, for the small white house on the side street was very plain and unpretentious, and its mistress, though a very sweet and estimable little old lady, was even more simple and unpretentious than the house; and the Committee for Making Our Old Home Week a Big Success were appalled at the thought of conducting the great Viola Sanderson to what they scornfully termed "that little snippy place."

"Yet, of course, Mis' Jones *is* a relative, her own mother's sister," moaned Mrs. French worriedly. "There's no getting away from *that!*"

At this point, to complicate matters still further, came the note from Mrs. Whipple, graciously offering the hospitality of her home for the entertainment of their expected guest Miss Viola Sanderson.

"And there the Whipples have got the very swellest-looking house in town, with that *porte-cochère*, and all," wailed one of the Committee when the letter was read. "We'd *love* to take her there. Besides, if we don't, what can we say to Mrs. Whipple? She'll get mad then, and we can't afford that. She's going to take ten tickets. She said she would. But if we don't let her have Miss Sanderson, after all her kind offer, she won't take one, maybe."

In this dilemma, as in many others, Mrs. French finally appealed to Sister Sue.

"Now what shall we do?" she demanded, when she had laid the case before her over the telephone. "What *can* we do?"

"Leave it to Miss Sanderson herself," answered Sister Sue promptly.

"To Miss Sanderson?"

"Of course. You'll have to. There's nothing else you can do that I can see," persisted Sister Sue. "You *want* her to go to Mrs. Whipple's, I judge, from what you say."

"Well, I guess we do! The idea of Viola Sanderson going to Jane Jones's to stay!"

"But Mrs. Jones can't be ignored, just the same,"

Sister Sue reminded her. "She *is* her aunt, you know. It would n't be fair to her, or even to Miss Sanderson herself, not to give her her aunt's invitation. At the same time you can tell her of the other. Then let her choose."

"All right," came the voice of Mrs. French doubtfully over the wire. "If you really think we ought to."

"I certainly do," declared Sister Sue as she hung up the receiver.

Arrangements for the ball-game were coming on apace. Sister Sue was not consulted about this, but she was told all about it. The players were all home-town young men, and were practicing every afternoon on the Common. The bank boys and retail clerks were going to play against a nine picked from the Kendall and Whipple shops. Before the Great Day they were to draw lots to see who should have Cy Bellows for pitcher. It was a foregone conclusion, of course, that the side which won Cy Bellows would win the game; though each team valiantly declared that they 'd give the other a fight for it, anyhow, even if they did have Cy Bellows for pitcher!

The fame of the game, as well as of the concert, was already spread abroad, for both had been advertised far and near. And already from remote corners of the State had come news of intending visitors.

Little wonder that Gilmoreville was on the *qui vive*, and that Sister Sue's small pupils droned out their one-two-three, one-two-three, with minds miles away from their fingers.

CHAPTER XI

DONALD KENDALL

It was on the last Saturday afternoon before Old Home Week that May rushed into the living-room where Sister Sue was awaiting a belated pupil.

"He's come!" she announced breathlessly.

"Well, I should think that it was time," answered the somewhat annoyed music-teacher. "But why, pray, all this excitement on your part? You're not usually so interested in my pupils. Where is he? Why does n't he come in? Well, what's the matter now?" she demanded with still more irritation as May began to giggle hysterically.

"It's Donald Kendall that's come — not your precious Jimmy Sargent," chattered May. "I just saw him."

"Oh! Well." Sister Sue was still frowning, though her eyes began to show a decided interest.

"I saw him get out of the motor at their door. I *know* it was he. He was tall and dark, just as Martin said; and he had a violin. Behind him came a little man with a big music portfolio under his arm. Then the chauffeur carried in two enormous suitcases and a hatbox. Oh, Sue, I'm crazy to see him! — near to, I mean. Are n't you?"

"I'm crazy to hear him play," emphasized Sister Sue severely; "and — oh, there's Jimmy, at last," she broke off, hurrying from the room.

The whole town knew before the day was over that Donald Kendall had arrived; and before twenty-four hours had passed, many who (like May) had longed to see him "near to," found their longing satisfied. For Donald Kendall went to church in the morning and sat in the Kendall pew. He seemed oblivious of the many curious glances cast in his direction; and his air, as he walked down the aisle upon leaving the church, did not invite approach, though he was civil enough to the few braver spirits who dared to speak to him.

In the afternoon he and his accompanist went to walk on the hill back of the house; and in the early evening May saw the big touring car come around to the door and take them all away for a ride.

Not until Monday morning did there come the sound of the violin; then, at almost the first note, Sister Sue and May ran to the corner of the vine-shaded veranda nearest the Kendall house.

"Hush! Listen! He's playing the Tschaikowsky concerto," whispered Sister Sue excitedly. Then, after a minute: "Oh, May, he *can* play!" Then, after another five minutes of ecstatic listening: "And —I've got to leave it! There's Susie — the little wretch! To think of having to hear *her* jangling with the memory of this in my ears!"

"I wonder if he remembers us," murmured May, trying to peer through the thick screen of leaves. "Sue, do you suppose we'll have to be introduced? I shan't. I'm going to go right up and speak to him when it's over. Shan't you?"

But Sister Sue had gone. And in a moment from

the piano in the house came the familiar one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three.

With a vexed gesture May ran to shut the door and the window; then she came back to her corner on the veranda.

She was there when the messenger boy on the bicycle dashed up the Kendall driveway, and she was still there through all the subsequent confusion; so that when Sister Sue came out on to the veranda for a breath of air between pupils, May was able to give her a full account of what had occurred.

"Something has happened, Sue!" she cried, fairly quivering with excitement. "First, Johnny Baxter came on his wheel with a telegram, and a minute later the music stopped right off short, and I could hear voices, away here — quick, excited voices as if something was wrong. Then it seems as though it was n't more than five minutes before the chauffeur had the car at the door and the little man — the accompanist, you know — came running down the steps with a suitcase and jumped into the car. Behind him Mr. Kendall was hurrying just as fast, only he did n't get into the car. He had his watch out and I heard him call: 'You'll make it! You've got ten minutes! Don't worry!' Then I knew he meant the train for New York, of course. And the car dashed off and Mr. Kendall went back into the house. In a minute I heard the violin; but it was n't at all as he played it before. It sounded, for all the world, like your piano when you are all worked up over something, only much worse."

"I can imagine it," nodded Sister Sue.

"It shrieked and groaned and fairly sent the shivers down my back; then he played the most wonderful double-stopping I ever, ever heard. The next minute the music stopped right off short again, and a moment later his majesty appeared on the piazza and began to walk up and down, up and down, like a wild thing. Twice his mother came out and said something, but he just waved her away as if she had been a fly that bothered; and by and by he went into the house, and I heard the violin again, only worse than before. I tell you, Sue, the piano is n't in it with the violin when it comes right down to expressing your opinion of matters and things without reserve! But what do you suppose it all means?"

"I can't imagine, except, of course, that the accompanist has gone. *That*'s plain to be seen. And maybe he can't get back for the concert. But, anyway, we'll know later, probably," she called back as she went to meet her next pupil coming up the steps.

And they did know. At noon Sister Sue was summoned to the telephone. When she came back to the table there was an odd smile on her face.

"Well, May, you'll have your wish. You will have an opportunity of seeing Donald Kendall real near to, this evening, if you like. He's coming over here."

"Here — to-night? Honestly?" May was guilty of trying to talk with her mouth full.

"Yes, at eight o'clock."

"To see us?" May spoke more distinctly now. "To — to call, you mean?"

"To practice — if he'll let me." Sister Sue's face was expressive.

"You don't mean — his violin!"

"Yes. His mother told me that she had persuaded him to let me try his accompaniments for Wednesday, and that he would be over at once."

"Now!" May's hands flew to her hair and the neck of her dress. "But I thought you said to-night!"

"I did. It was she who said 'now.'" Sister Sue's face was still expressive of that curious something. "And she did n't even *ask* me, either. She said he was coming."

"And you dared to put Donald Kendall off till to-night?" gasped May.

"Certainly. I told Mrs. Kendall that I could n't see her son this afternoon. I had pupils."

"Pupils! — when Donald Kendall wanted you to play for him!" gasped May again. "Sister Sue, how could you?"

"But I had to." Sister Sue's voice was spirited, her eyes flashed a little. "Donald Kendall is not my bread-and-butter, and my pupils are. Besides, I was really rather glad that I could n't be ready just the minute his lordship demanded. As I said, Mrs. Kendall did n't ask if he might come, or if I'd be willing to play for him. She said she had persuaded him to let me *try*, and he was coming right over."

"Then his accompanist *has* gone."

"Yes. His father is very ill — dying, the telegram said. I guess they think there's no chance of his getting back in time. So they had to take me."

"Had to take you, indeed! As if they were n't the luckiest things in the world to get you!" cried May.

"Oh, I don't know," shrugged Sister Sue. "I fancy Donald Kendall does n't think so."

And Donald Kendall did not think so. Just how strongly Donald Kendall was of this opinion it was perhaps quite as well that Sister Sue did not know. It was just as well, too, perhaps, that she did not know exactly what had taken place before his mother's telephone message, otherwise there might have been a still longer wait before she was ready to receive Mr. Donald Kendall.

What had occurred was this:

"But what are you going to do, dear?" Mrs. Kendall had asked her son when he was calm enough to do something besides wave her away irritably. He had laid down his violin and thrown himself dejectedly into a chair. Twice before, on the veranda, she had spoken to him; but he would not even listen. He had come into the house then, and had played furiously on his violin until exhausted. "What *are* you going to do?" she repeated.

"I shall play without accompaniment."

"Donald, you never would!"

"But I shall."

"But, Donald, it won't sound half so good." She was almost crying. "I noticed this morning how the piano filled in and rounded the whole thing out, and made the violin part wonderful. I don't see how you can play it without the piano."

"Oh, I shan't play that concerto, of course. I shall play something else."

"You mean —! Donald, you *would n't* get up there and play some snippy little no-account thing *that* day!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "There are melodies," he began; but she interrupted him.

"Now, Donald, you are *not* going to get up there and play any old 'Home, Sweet Home,' or 'Last Rose of Summer.' That might do in New York and places where they'd understand the fine artistry of your performance — but not here. They'll have to have noise and show and fireworks here!"

"But, mother, as if I cared —" began the man, again with a shrug.

"Then care for me!" interrupted his mother tragically. "You are in your own home town — the town I have to live in, remember. Men, women, and children will be here who never heard you before, and who will never hear you again. Call it silly, foolish, false pride, if you will. I don't care. I want these people to think you are the wonder you really are — but they never will in the world if you get up there and play some little old tune they know by heart already."

"But, mother, will you kindly tell me what I *can* do?" demanded the violinist irritably.

"Play what you were going to, with piano accompaniment."

"But, good Heavens! with whom? Dodge can't possibly get back, and you know it."

"Get some one here."

"Here! — in this town! — To play the Tschaikowsky concerto — for *me!*"

"Certainly." Mrs. Kendall still held her ground in spite of the horror in her son's face. "I think Sister Sue could do it."

"And pray who may Sister Sue be? I did n't know that Gilmoreville sported a — a nunnery."

"Nonsense, don't be silly, Donald. It's Sue Gilmore, the little girl next door you used to play with years ago. Even then they used to call her Sister Sue. Don't you remember? Always, to any questions you asked of any of the family there was only one answer: 'Sister Sue will know'; 'Sister Sue will do it.'"

"Indeed! And so you think this all-powerful, all-knowing Sister Sue can play the Tschaikowsky concerto for me Wednesday afternoon, do you?"

"She can *try*."

"Thanks. I've had aspiring pianists *try* before. It was not a pleasant experience. I really should not care to repeat it."

"But, Donald; indeed, she plays very nicely, and she has been teaching all summer."

"The village children?"

"Yes; and four from the Junction, too."

"I know. 'The Maiden's Prayer,' and, 'Listen to the Mocking Bird with Variations.' I recognize the type."

"But, Donald, you could try her. It would n't do any harm to let her try. There's time enough. Please, please let me go and tell her you'll be over this after-

noon with the music. And, Donald, have n't you got something easier, that's still showy and fine-sounding, something she *could* do, if she can't do the concerto? You can try her on the concerto, first, of course."

It was after ten minutes more of such pleading that Donald Kendall (chiefly to avoid hearing it any longer) consented that his mother should telephone to Sister Sue next door. Two minutes later Mrs. Kendall came back from the instrument, her face flooded with anger.

"Well, you've had your way," began her son discontentedly, without looking up, "and I suppose I'm in for it after luncheon. What time do I go?"

"Not till evening — eight o'clock." Mrs. Kendall's voice shook. "The little wretch had the impertinence to say that she could n't attend to it this afternoon. Pupils. The idea! — and the honor *you* were doing her!"

An odd expression came to Donald Kendall's face. He stared, frowned, then shrugged his shoulders again. The next minute he had turned away without a word.

It was just eight o'clock when Donald Kendall rang the Gilmores' front-door bell. He carried a violin in its case and a portfolio of music.

May advanced at once from the shadow of the vines.

"Good-evening, Mr. Kendall!" she greeted him blithely. "Won't you come in and sit down, please? I will tell Sister Sue you are here. I am May. You

don't remember, probably, but we remember you very well."

"Yes, we remember you very well," echoed a new voice as Sister Sue herself appeared in the doorway. "Won't you come in, Mr. Kendall?"

"Er — thank you, yes." Donald Kendall's lips smiled, but his eyes were somber, and there was a frown between the heavy black brows. "My mother said perhaps you'd be willing to try — that is — that perhaps you could play my accompaniments for me Wednesday."

"I shall be glad to. Won't you be seated, please?"

They were in the stiff parlor room with the hair-wreath and the coffin-plates staring down at them. Donald Kendall put down his violin and his music; and May began to talk brightly — archly asking him how it felt to be so famous and to come to his old home town like this, and did he remember what a wretch he used to be and how he tormented the lives out of those two poor little girls next door, who just worshiped him if only he'd stop teasing and play with them?

Mr. Donald Kendall did not remember — much. Oh, yes! he remembered the little girls, of course, and he was very sorry he had been so rude and inconsiderate, he was sure.

But the frown was still on his face and his eyes still were somber and he was plainly nervous and impatient — and bored — and enduring it all merely as a necessary preliminary to the business on hand. At last he turned to Sister Sue decisively, saying:

"I've brought the music. I have it here — what I planned to play. But I'm afraid you will find it — er — rather difficult. In that case there are one or two others — I could substitute them, if necessary. Of course, I don't expect you to play them to-night without first looking them over. You can practice them a little to-morrow. Then to-morrow night I'll come over again — with your permission" (this last plainly as an afterthought) — "and we can try them."

"May I see them, please?" Sister Sue rose and went to the piano. She was serene, demure, and innocent, but there was an odd little something in her eyes that would have puzzled Mr. Donald Kendall very, very much had he seen it.

"Yes, that's what I wanted, to show them to you," he said, hastily getting to his feet. "I just wanted to tell you the tempo — time, you know — of some of the movements."

"I see," murmured Sister Sue. "Suppose we take first the — the pieces you wanted to play," she suggested.

"Very well." With a frown, and an obviously resigned sigh, the violinist selected some sheets of music and placed them on the piano rack. Sister Sue looked at the first page interestedly and nodded her head. She did not hesitate long. The man took out his violin and tested a string.

"Give me 'A,' please."

Obediently, Sister Sue struck the key. Still frowning, still resigned, Donald Kendall pointed with the bow in his hand to the opening score.

"I take it about like this," he said, and played a few bars. "Then over here" — he turned the pages rapidly — "the andante should go slowly, very slowly. Then the scherzo here, quick, animated — just as fast as you can and then 't won't be fast enough, I'll warrant." Sister Sue's lips came together quickly. "Here, you have these runs and trills alone. And those eight measures there, they're rather difficult, you'll find. But, of course, they *could* be omitted, I suppose, though 't would be a pity."

"Yes, it would," murmured Sister Sue. Then, cheerfully, "Well, I think I understand. Shall we try it?" she asked, turning back to the first page.

"Now?"

"Why, yes, I'd like to."

The man's frown deepened.

"But, Miss Gilmore! Now? Before you even practice it? I would n't, really. You — you'll get discouraged at the very beginning — while, maybe, if you'd practice it —" He let a significant pause finish the sentence for him.

"Oh, yes, I know," smiled Sister Sue sweetly. "Very likely I can play it better after I practice it, but I thought I'd like to run it through once or twice now."

"Run it through, *run it through!* — Run it — run a concerto for the violin and piano through once or twice!" Very plainly Mr. Donald Kendall had lost his temper now and did not care who knew it. "Very well, young woman, we will! But remember your sin will be on your own head. I did my best to warn you.

This is no 'Maiden's Prayer,' or 'Listen to the Mocking Bird with Variations,' as you'll soon find out. But I'll 'run it through' for you. I'll play it straight through from the beginning to the end. I don't need the notes. As for you, when you can, play; when you can't, keep quiet and wait till a place where you can. Above all things, *don't drag*. If you're not sure of your notes, don't slow up and pick them out; stop; stop, I say, and wait till you can come in again with me. Now, ready!" And he motioned for her to begin.

Over in the corner May gasped aloud. For one brief instant Sister Sue looked as if she were going to leave the piano. She did, indeed, half start from her seat. Then, with a demure little smile, she lifted her hands and struck the opening notes.

And then Donald Kendall began to play. Very plainly he was master of the score and of his instrument. At the first few notes from the piano, accurate and unhesitating, he had turned sharply, his questioning eyes on the girl's unperturbed face. All through the first half of the first movement he had the air of one who finds himself walking on familiar ground when he was expecting uncertainty to break through a treacherous crust. But very soon evidently he forgot that, and long before the end of the first movement was reached, he had lost himself entirely in the world of exquisite melody he was making for himself.

In the corner May caught her breath, and held it, afraid to let it out lest some of the entrancing cadence be lost. Martin Kent came up the walk, and May, seeing him, went to admit him, her finger to her lips.

Then together they tiptoed back to the parlor and slipped silently into their chairs.

As from a single instrument under the will of a single mind came the wondrous music, so exactly were the two players together, whether in a swelling pæan of triumphant rejoicing or the whisper of some fair voices far in the distance. Enchanted and enthralled, the two listeners across the room sat motionless. No less enchanted and enthralled, the players themselves very clearly had lost all consciousness of anything but the creation of their own melodious harmony. At the piano Sister Sue, as if under the sway of some magic message from his mind to hers, kept pace, note for note; — now faster and faster, till her fingers seemed scarcely to touch the keys; now slower and slower, till each note was a lingering caress bringing out the very soul of the instrument itself. And when the last strain had quieted into silence, May and Martin Kent drew a long breath of ecstasy which was echoed by Donald Kendall himself.

"That was something like!" he breathed. Then, as if in sudden realization, he turned to the girl at the piano. "And you — *you!* For Heaven's sake, child, who and what are you?" he demanded.

Sister Sue, whose face till that moment had been rapt, eager, and alight, like the faces of the others, changed color.

"I? Oh — I — I'm Sister Sue," she shrugged, and, wheeling back to the piano, lightly touched the keys — perhaps to show that her answer was really as light as it sounded to be.

"But — to — to read like that, to say nothing of playing as you did!" He stared, still with a puzzled frown.

"Sister Sue was the crack sight-reader in Signor Bartoni's class last year," bragged May shamelessly.

Then somebody remembered that Martin Kent did not know Mr. Kendall; thereupon formal introductions were made, and the talk for a few moments became general, but not for long. Without asking, Donald Kendall turned again to Sister Sue.

"I'm going to play this for the second piece," he began, eagerly placing on the rack a fresh score; "would you mind trying this — just a bit?"

"Oh, no! I would n't mind it at all." Sister Sue's face had suddenly broken into a broad smile as she let her fingers fall on the keys.

After that it was another, and another.

And so on they played, oblivious of everything but themselves and their music before them. In the corner May yawned behind her hand and Martin Kent fidgeted with his watch-chain, pulling at the watch itself at intervals more frequent than polite. After a time he rose to his feet. He said he must go — really he must.

May rose at once to her feet.

Donald Kendall said, "Yes, yes, to be sure. Goodnight." All of which was tossed over his shoulder without so much as the turning of the head away from the sheets of music he was sorting.

Sister Sue rose and came forward with her hand outstretched. Under her breath she said she was

sorry to have to seem inhospitable to him, but of course he'd understand that she had to attend to the music that evening.

Her eyes were very bright and her cheeks were very pink and her whole face was alight with eager excitement. Martin Kent's eyes were not bright, his cheeks were not flushed, and not a bit of his face was alight with eager excitement. Martin Kent, in fact, looked actually cross as he strode down the walk toward the street. Under his breath he was muttering: "Deliver me from a fool man who does n't know a thing but how to fiddle — and wants to fiddle all the time."

CHAPTER XII

GREETINGS AND ENCORES

By Tuesday morning Old Home Week in Gilmoreville was in full swing. The whole town was having a holiday. Cy Bellows had arrived the night before and had been carried on the shoulders of a cheering multitude to the final lucky choice of entertainers. The drawing had been made and the manufacturers' nine had won the star pitcher, and were off somewhere now in secret session preparing for the grand game. In another part of the town the disappointed, but by no means discouraged, nine were also in secret session, pledging themselves to see that it was no "walk-over" and that they would give the shop boys "a good fight, anyhow."

At ten o'clock Miss Kate Farnum, the novelist, came accompanied by her secretary. With some relief and all deference, but with no enthusiasm, the ladies were escorted to the Inn and established in the Bridal Suite of two bedrooms, bath, and reception-room — really a sumptuous apartment; though, as the indignant hotel clerk afterwards reported, it was not quite satisfactory — the lady observing to her secretary upon entering that the rooms were hot and stuffy, and *did* she ever see such hideous wall-paper in her life!

Mrs. French, the Chairman of the Committee for Making Our Old Home Week a Big Success, and two

of her henchwomen somewhat tremblingly waited on the distinguished lady — gave her a programme for the entertainment the next day — hoped that her place on it was satisfactory and that she was in good health — said they were very glad to see her and felt deeply honored by her presence. Conversation rather languished after that, and the Committee took its somewhat nervous departure, drawing a very long breath when once outside the hotel door.

"Well! If our singer is any worse than *she* is, I pity us," breathed Mrs. French with relief, taking out a lace-bordered handkerchief and starting to wipe her perspiring face with it, stopping just in time, however, and substituting one with no lace from another pocket. "Heaven knows I wish this first-meeting part of the business was over!"

"And we've got to meet the singer at the depot," mourned the Committee lady with the purple hat.

"I know it," sighed Mrs. French; "but it's the last of 'em. Remember that."

"Goodness knows I hope she'll go to the Whipples'!" cried the third member of the Committee, who wore glasses. "If Kate Farnum finds fault with the wall-paper at the Inn, what do you suppose Viola Sanderson, the grandest of 'em all, will say to that little old Jones house?"

"I don't know," groaned Mrs. French. "But then we need n't worry. She won't go there, of course."

"But Jane Jones *thinks* she's coming," spoke up she of the purple hat.

"That ain't our fault," responded Mrs. French,

somewhat haughtily. "We told her about the Whipples' invitation. Now, remember! Four o'clock — sharp — in the waiting-room at the depot. Then we'll be all ready for the train at five minutes past," she added as she turned down the street.

And at four o'clock sharp they were there — Mrs. French, the lady of the purple hat, and the one who wore glasses. They had n't long to wait or worry, for promptly on time the train rolled in and there stepped down from the parlor car the handsomely dressed, smiling woman whom they recognized from her pictures as the great coloratura soprano.

It was at that moment that the full awfulness of the task before her struck Mrs. French dumb. Advancing mechanically, she came to a stop, supported on each side by the purple hat and the eyeglasses. But she was silent. As if by intuition, Viola Sanderson understood and came promptly to the rescue.

"And did you come to meet me!" she exclaimed. "How perfectly lovely! And it is just like coming home, is n't it?"

"How do you do?" "Yes'm! If you please." "We're quite well, thank you" — stammered miserably the three members of the Committee for Making Our Old Home Week a Big Success. Then Mrs. French added:

"We've come to take you to the rich Mrs. Whipple's."

"Yes." A swift shadow came over the singer's face. "Oh, but my aunt. I — I had a letter —" she hesitated.

"Oh, yes. Mrs. Jones," nodded Mrs. French, quite certain of herself now. "She did ask you. I was going to say so, but I forgot. But of course you won't go there."

"Won't go!" Viola Sanderson looked startled. "Aunt Jane is n't sick, is she?"

"Oh, no! But the house is so small."

"And plain."

"And worse wall-paper than at the Inn."

"And feather beds."

"And no finger bowls."

"And kerosene lamps. And no tiled bathroom."

"And no lovely port — portcullis. And no conservatory."

"And nothing but old-fashioned furniture."

One after another these dire disadvantages were rapidly hinted at to the astonished visitor by the three flushed and perspiring Committee ladies. And for a minute Miss Sanderson stared at them a little confusedly, as she listened. Then suddenly she laughed. And when the last came about the old-fashioned furniture she held up a protesting hand.

"Oh! But I adore old-fashioned furniture," she declared brightly. "And I'll have Aunt Jennie, anyway, and that's what I want most of anything. So please won't you take me to Mrs. Jones?"

"Why, yes. Of course. If you really want us to. But — but —"

"I really want you to." Viola Sanderson spoke pleadingly, earnestly. She smiled, too.

But there was a little something in her eyes that

made the three Committee ladies, after one glance into her face, stammer:

"Why, yes — yes! Of course!" And they hurriedly led the way to the waiting automobile.

By night the town was filled to overflowing. Every available bed in town had been appropriated. Cots had been set up in chamber-halls and in lodge-rooms and shelters hastily erected on private grounds. Prodigious stocks of food had been prepared, and one might obtain a sandwich or a piece of pie at almost every corner.

Four guests were at the Gilmores' house, besides Gordon, who had cut short his camping trip by five days and had arrived that morning. His coming was a surprise to the family, for he had written that he would not be there. But a telegram announcing his expected arrival came just in time to prevent Sister Sue from handing over his unoccupied bed to the distraught Committee for Housing Our Guests.

"Come? Of course, I'd come!" he cried, when Sister Sue greeted him that Tuesday morning.

"But you said you would n't — not but what we're delighted to have you, of course," laughed Sister Sue. "only why the sudden change?"

"Cy Bellows — ball-game. We got the news 'way out in camp just in time. The idea of having him here! Say! You could n't hire me to keep away! The fellow who brought that thing about did some stunt, let me tell you."

"Well, the 'fellow' was Sister Sue," boasted May importantly.

"Sue!"

"Yes. And Viola Sanderson, and Kate Farnum, and Donald Kendall — they're all coming! And Sister Sue did that."

"Great work! Well, I shan't take back what I said," retorted Gordon. "And so Donald Kendall is coming, is he?"

"Yes — and there he is now!" cried May, her eyes on the tall figure coming up the walk. "And look at the music he's got. Lucky you told your pupils not to come to-day, Sue," laughed May as she went to the door.

"I had to. I found that out yesterday from the pupils themselves. I could n't hold their attention five minutes."

"Well, you can hold Donald Kendall's attention all right," was May's parting shot.

"I'm going to play for him. He's coming to practice," explained Sister Sue to her brother in answer to the somewhat mystified expression on Gordon's face. "Oh, Gordon! His playing is something wonderful."

A minute later Donald Kendall was in the room. He said good-morning, and he acknowledged the introduction of Gordon with a measure of cordiality, but it all was plainly only a necessary formality that had to precede the real business of the day. And in another minute he had indicated what that business was.

"I've brought two or three things here I'd like to have you try once, please," he said to Sister Sue.

"Here's that largo of Liszt's. We might decide to play that instead of the concerto."

On the veranda, a few minutes later, Gordon accosted his sister May, who had taken her writing-pad to the vine-shaded corner, with:

"How long is that chap going to stay?"

"Till noon, probably. But he'll be back again after dinner (or luncheon, I believe the Kendalls call it), I'll warrant. The creature has no sense of time (except his own!) when he's playing, that's plain to be seen. He stayed till half-past eleven last night. Then something — maybe I dropped a hint — made him take out his watch, and I saw his face fall. 'I suppose I'll have to go, it's so late,' he says with a frown, 'but to-morrow — perhaps —' 'Yes, to-morrow I'll be very glad to,' says Sister Sue. But even then he stayed ten minutes longer, playing over and over again a little phrase that he wanted to get *just so*. Poor Martin! He stood it till half-past ten, hoping for a moment with Sister Sue to himself. Then he gave up in despair and left — which was best — for it was exactly a quarter to twelve when Donald Kendall strode down the walk to go home."

"Um-m! Martin'll be getting jealous."

"Jealous, nothing!" scoffed May. "You can't be jealous of a walking fiddle! I don't believe that Donald Kendall knows this minute whether Sister Sue is the distractingly pretty girl she is, or whether she is squint-eyed and freckled with a wart on her nose. No, Martin Kent need never be jealous of him. But he can play. Listen!" And she held up her finger as

the strains of exquisite melody floated through the open door.

Wednesday came. It was a perfect day. Certainly all roads led to Gilmoreville that day. And long before ten o'clock — the hour for the ball-game — they were black with cars, carriages, wagons, and even hay-wagons — packed to the limit with cheering, horn-blowing humanity. Extra trains brought more, and by ten o'clock there was no doubt as to the success of the Gilmoreville Old Home Day if the size of the crowds was any indication.

And it was a success. Unquestionably, it was a success. Promptly at ten came the Ball-Game. It lasted two hours. The manufacturers' nine won, of course, as was expected, but they very unmistakably had to fight for their victory, and the wildly excited spectators certainly got their money's worth of thrills. At noon came the Banquet with the honored guests at the head table where all might be seen. At two o'clock came the Entertainment in the Big Tent. The brass band covered itself with glory in the opening overture which it had been practicing for weeks. Miss Kate Farnum, the novelist, in a remarkable costume which was a cross between a kimona and a ball-dress, read thirty minutes from her latest novel after first making sure that she had a glass of water near by and that the ushers understood her orders for none to be admitted during her reading. She was very dramatic. Her voice rose and swelled — almost shrieked — only to die away in a hoarse whisper that sent delirious shivers down unaccustomed spinal

columns. She was applauded wildly, which brought only her secretary to the front of the stage to announce that owing to the great nervous exhaustion following her readings it was impossible for Miss Farnum to respond to any encore — she must beg, therefore, to be excused. This was received with an uncertain applause that was promptly hushed as if a restraining hand had been put forth with a shocked: "Hush! You must n't clap, because she is n't coming."

The Unitarian minister then got up to introduce the singer. The Baptist and Congregationalist ministers respectively had introduced the band and the novelist with great flourish of verbal eloquence. It remained for the Unitarian to outdo them if possible. And he quite succeeded. Then appeared Viola Sanderson, in a blaze of green and gold and iridescence that "just to see" was well worth the price of admission (according to Mrs. French and her of the purple hat). There came a surprise then. The most of the audience had never before heard a human songbird who trilled and warbled in limpid notes of melody that rivaled the flute and soared away above their heads to unbelievable heights of liquid purity. And when the exquisite voice had died into silence, there came a burst of applause that would not be denied, and that very plainly declared that no secretarial response would do this time. But they need not have feared. Again, and yet again, did the singer return to make them marvel that such wondrous sounds could emanate from a human throat, until at last, with

smiles and bows and a deprecatory gesture of "Really, dear people — I can't, any more!" was she allowed to rest.

It was left for the Methodist minister then to outdo himself and all his brethren in his verbal triumphs heralding their distinguished violinist, Mr. Donald Kendall. And once again they went wild, those men and women and children who never before knew that "just a fiddle" could bring to their ears the winds from the mountains, the voices from the sea, the shouts and songs of triumphant multitudes, and the despairing wail of a woman who has lost her soul; or the tripping feet of fairies in the moonlight; or the tramp of vast armies marching on to victory. Donald Kendall was gracious but unsmiling. He came back twice, and rewarded their enthusiasm with a dainty little scherzo, then with a very tender rendering of "Home, Sweet Home," which brought the house to its feet in the wildest of cheers, notwithstanding the scornful predictions the violinist's mother had made two days before. He played it this time unaccompanied, however. It is doubtful, though, if half a dozen disinterested persons in the audience noticed whether he was accompanied or not. Those who knew and understood, however, realized that the quiet little woman at the piano was really depicting the very heights of her art, by keeping her playing so nicely attuned to his that it was but a background against which his performance showed clear and distinct in all its wondrous brilliance and beauty. And when the last echo of the applause had died away, the

huge throng drew a long breath and dispersed, telling of the marvels they had heard.

In the evening came the Reception and Ball, when the guests of honor stood in line and became just folks with hands that one might take, and faces that one might gaze into, and say to, "I'm *so* glad to meet you!" Even the writer lady consented to endure this for a good half-hour — before she pleaded fatigue and retired to one of the thronelike chairs which had been prepared for the honored guests when the Ball should begin.

The Ball, too, was a success. True, the writer lady declined gracefully to dance, and Donald Kendall looked on from afar with eyes that were a trifle bored if not scornful. But Cy Bellows danced with every girl on the floor — at least a few times — besides bringing down the house with a solo clog dance between two numbers on the programme. The singer, too, danced. She danced with every daring man who asked her, and with several who did not — except with their pleading eyes. And she left with them all the memory of a charming smile and a cordial word which would long be treasured by the fortunate recipients.

Sister Sue was on the floor, and Sister Sue danced frequently. She was radiantly smiling and her eyes were bright, but there was, nevertheless, a tired little something, somewhere, that the discerning could plainly see.

She said, yes, oh, yes, it had been a wonderful day, and the Entertainment was indeed very fine. And,

yes, she had enjoyed it all greatly. To the one or two who said: "But I heard you wrote the letters and got all these great people here — so we owe it all to you!" she answered: "Nonsense! What do those few letters amount to? Any one could have written them. I did n't do anything special!" And then she would laugh again sweetly and say "Nonsense!" as she turned away.

And when the last trainload of cheering visitors had chugged out of the little station, and the last automobile and hay-wagon had carried its burden of horn-blowing humanity well out of hearing, the town drew a long breath that was yet a deep sigh of content and laid itself down to sleep. Gilmoreville Old Home Day had most certainly been an unqualified success.

And in all the town there was probably only one whose eyes were smarting with tears and whose throat was tightening with a half-stifled sob. But then, in all the town there was only one trying to banish into the oblivion of forgetfulness that siren call of "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore! Encore!"

CHAPTER XIII

DEPARTING GUESTS

VERY early Thursday morning, before the first of Sister Sue's pupils were due, Donald Kendall rang the Gilmores' doorbell.

Delia admitted him to the living-room, then went upstairs, where Sister Sue was telling her father for the third time that morning all about the Old Home Day Celebration.

"The fiddler — he wants you, Miss," said Delia, with a crispness that spoke loudly of her dishes cooling in the kitchen sink.

"Me?" Sister Sue showed her surprise.

"He said *you*, Miss. I put him in the sittin'-room." And Delia, whose especial detestation was to answer the doorbell, particularly in the morning, turned and clattered down the back stairway.

More slowly Sister Sue turned toward the front part of the house. There was still a faint questioning in her eyes when she entered the living-room, where Donald Kendall was waiting alone.

"Good-morning, Mr. Kendall," holding out her hand.

"Good-morning." Donald Kendall advanced hurriedly. He had the air of a man who had come with a bit of news too good to keep. "It's early, I know, but I had to come right away. It came to me in the night what I could do."

"What you could do?" murmured Sister Sue, still with a slight frown. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Kendall."

"I must n't stop long." He dropped himself into a chair as she took her seat. "I'll have to go back and write to Dodge right away, of course. It did n't come to me until in the night what I could do. But now I know. I've decided to have you for my accompanist, Miss Gilmore. I'll pay you enough, of course, so you can take your sister, or any one you like, along with you for companionship and propriety. But that's a mere detail. We can settle that later. There will be no trouble about compensation, Miss Gilmore. I start West on my first concert tour in about two weeks. I thought you ought to know as soon as possible."

Sister Sue had come erect in her chair. Her face had shown blank incomprehension during the first half of his speech, then amazement, then anger. There was scorn in her eyes now, scorn with a tinge of amusement.

"Well, yes, I should want to know as soon as possible if I were going on a concert trip with you," she said.

"Yes, of course, of course!" He nodded abstractedly. He was not looking at her now. "As it is, there is all too short a time to practice. But you are such a good reader that —"

She interrupted him.

"Mr. Kendall. Just a minute, please. You don't understand. I said if I *were* going on a concert trip

with you; but I'm not. Why, Mr. Kendall, I can't play your accompaniments for you!"

The man gave an impatient gesture.

"But I say you can! And I rather think I know. You are away ahead of Dodge; you are away ahead of —" He paused, then went on with somewhat pompous impressiveness: "Miss Gilmore, I can honestly say that never have I had any one who plays my accompaniments as you do. You never drag, never pull. You are always superbly right there — with me."

He sat back with the gesture of one who has settled a matter once for all.

"Thank you, Mr. Donald Kendall." Sister Sue was still quietly smiling. "That is high praise, I know. Yet still I must say I cannot play your accompaniments for you."

"What do you mean?"

"It is absurd, out of the question. I cannot go away like that."

"But you may take your sister, a companion, any one. I told you that."

She shook her head a bit impatiently now.

"You don't understand. I can't leave my home. I have duties here — my father — the home — my brother and sister —"

"Stuff and nonsense!" he interrupted with the rudeness of a spoiled autocrat whose will is crossed. "You have some duties to yourself, have n't you? Any one can do your work here. But the chance I offer you — See here, young woman, you don't

seem to realize that you have talent — extraordinary talent. Are you going to waste it all in teaching scales and five-finger exercises to a dozen urchins who'll never know the difference between a Beethoven symphony and 'Johnny, Get Your Gun'? Have n't you any ambition? Don't you ever want to do something worth while in the world?"

Long before he had finished speaking she was on her feet. There was no smile on her lips now nor amusement in her eyes. She was white and shaking. Her voice, when she spoke, was not steady.

"Ambition? Something worth while in the world?" she repeated. And then, all reserve swept aside, she told him her heart's longings. She told him what the great music-master had said. She told him what she hoped and hungered to do. And so vividly did she tell it that even the startled man across the room seemed to hear at least the echo of that call: "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore! Encore!"

She paused then, but only for breath. In a moment she went on chokingly. She told him of the failure and all the horrors and terrors that had walked in its wake. She told of her father's condition now and of how dependent on her he was. She spoke of Gordon and of May and her hopes for them. And, as she talked, Donald Kendall was irresistibly compelled to see that the position of Sister Sue in her home was one around which, as on a pivot, the whole family had for years revolved. All the while she spoke kindly, yet fervently, with little half-finished phrases more eloquent by far than if they had been completed. It was a rush

as of long-pent-up forces that had suddenly found vent. Then, without warning, in the middle of a sentence, she broke off with a little sob:

"Oh, what have I said! What have I said!" she moaned. "I must have been beside myself to talk like this to you — to any one! But the things you said — If you can, forget; and —" Then very calmly, "There's Carrie now, for her lesson. If you will excuse me, please."

The next moment Donald Kendall, at first chagrined, then dumbfounded and dismayed, and with a feeling almost of humiliation, found himself alone. Almost at once came the droning one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three, from the room across the hall, and then Mr. Donald Kendall arose, picked up his hat, and went home.

Although, as the words would imply, Gilmoreville Old Home Week ostensibly continued through the entire seven days, yet in reality there was but little in the way of entertainment or of interest after that wonderful Wednesday. There were a few family reunions, and sundry parties and picnics. Viola Sanderson stayed through the week with her aunt and apparently minded not at all the privation of "no portcullis and conservatory." Cy Bellows left on the morning train Thursday, followed by the ringing cheers of half the town as long as the train was in sight. Miss Kate Farnum and her secretary left on the same train. Hearing the shouts Miss Farnum looked out of the window and smiled and bowed very graciously to the cheering throng. She seemed

pleased, better pleased, perhaps, than she would have been had she known that those shouts were not for her, but for the popular ball-player in the car behind. But she did not know, which did Cy Bellows no harm and may possibly have done her some good.

Donald Kendall left, too, that same Thursday, though later in the day. In the afternoon he went over to the Gilmores' and said his stiffly proper farewells. He thanked Sister Sue formally for playing his accompaniments so finely, but he avoided her eyes except for a brief instant at the last, and then he did n't meet them, for Sister Sue, herself, was looking somewhere else. He shook hands with May and Gordon, and then hurried away.

"I don't imagine he's improved much — in manners," observed May as the gate clicked under his hand.

Sister Sue did not reply. She was very busy over some music at the piano. Then the next moment Jennie Howard came for her lesson.

Jennie had a poor lesson. It was plain to be seen that she had practiced very little. She bungled her scales and hit innumerable wrong notes in her "piece." She played inattentively and out of time. It was the same with all the pupils that came afterwards, until by night Sister Sue was completely worn out with the fret and annoyance of it all. She was still very tired when Martin Kent came that evening; so tired that she was not like herself. She sat back in her chair on the veranda, listless and preoccupied, while May and Martin chatted over the events of the

day before. Frequently they turned to her with a question, and she answered, but still listless and still preoccupied. Yes, Viola Sanderson was very winning and very affable indeed. No, she did n't care much for the novelist. Yes, Donald Kendall was a fine player. Yes, she danced with Cy Bellows, once. No, she did n't call him handsome. Yes and no; no and yes. That was all.

When May went into the house after a time and left the two together, and when Sister Sue gave an abstracted "no" to his last question asking her if she had ever seen worse weather than that of the day before, Martin Kent promptly remonstrated:

"Sue! For Heaven's sake, what's the matter with you to-night?" he asked. "No, no; yes, yes. That's all anybody can get out of you. And I've just proved that when you say even that much you have n't any idea as to what you are really saying. I asked you if you had ever seen worse weather than we had yesterday, and you very serenely answered 'no'; while, as it so happened, there could n't have been a more perfect day — and you know it."

The girl aroused herself and laughed shamefacedly.

"Martin, I beg your pardon. I'm horrid, I know it; and I was n't thinking of what you were saying. But I will now, I promise. Try me."

"But what is the matter with you?"

"Tired, I suppose."

"Of course you're tired! Digging at that old piano every minute since Monday evening when that fool

violinist first found out you could play. Did n't the man have any sense?"

Sister Sue laughed.

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't think he had a superabundance of it — when he got his violin in hand. But I did n't mind that, really. The long hours of practice — I loved them. It — it was to-day — all day — those impossible children stumbling through their lessons!" She paused, then went on with a whimsical smile, "You know, it is n't easy to come down to peeling potatoes after having had a little fling at eating frostings."

"H-mm! I suppose not." Martin Kent was still fretting. "But that eternal practicing for that exacting man had something to do with it, just the same," he maintained. "It was wearing, very wearing."

She shook her head.

"I did n't feel it; not that. I loved it. But, Martin! You should have been here earlier that Monday night, when he first came in, and heard the instructions the dear man gave me about not dragging and not playing at all if I could n't keep up with him."

"Yes, I know. May told me," grunted the man. "Impertinent puppy!"

"He was n't exactly polite," laughed Sister Sue, "but, as Gordon says, 'he can play!'"

"So can you," retorted Martin Kent. "But he need n't think, just because of that, he can keep you playing for him all the time."

"I don't — think — he does." An amused expression had come to Sister Sue's face. "He said this

morning — but never mind," she broke off with a shrug and a quick change of manner, "he's gone now."

"Yes, he's gone now," echoed Martin Kent with a sigh that was obvious in its content. "And as for those tiresome, never-ending children — they'll be gone one of these days. Just wait till my 'Trixie' makes a hit!"

"I'm waiting," smiled Sister Sue mischievously.

"You don't believe in it, but listen. I received a letter from the publishers to-day and they report a very good advance sale. A very good one," he repeated impressively with aggrieved emphasis.

But Sister Sue only laughed again and said: "I'm waiting."

With the passing of Old Home Week Gilmoreville settled down and went about its usual business. With the tent removed and the sidewalk attractions banished, there was little but memory to remind the villagers of that one glorious week of debauch.

In the Gilmore homestead it seemed to Sister Sue that life had reverted even more than ever into a mere matter of potato-peeling for her. Martin Kent had gone back to the city, and she and May told each other they did not know how much his breezy visits meant to them — until they were without them. School had opened and Gordon was enrolled as a pupil, but he was plainly holding himself very much aloof from the other boys and also making himself and everybody else miserable. May had definitely

given up trying to enter college. If there was not enough money coming in, she said, to send her decently and properly she did not care to go. As for trying to pay her way partly by waiting on tables, or darning the other girls' silk stockings, she preferred not to go at all rather than do these things. Much to Sister Sue's disappointment, therefore, she had given up all idea of a college education.

"But, May! I could help you a lot, and maybe I could pay it all, after a little," pleaded Sister Sue.

"Yes, and how should I feel with all my old friends swelling around in their good clothes and me behind their chairs waiting on them, and begging for their silk stockings to darn! Mercy! Sue, I *could n't* do it."

"I suppose it would be hard," replied the elder girl.

"Besides," avowed May with a sudden but somewhat forced display of unselfish consideration for her sister, "as if I'd go away, anyhow, and leave you slaving here at home to pay my bills. Certainly not!"

"But, May, you need it. You need it in your work. What *will* you do?"

"I'm going to write here at home. Martin says I can. I told him before he went away that I was n't going to let you slave yourself to death helping me through college." May pursed her lips virtuously. "And we have it all fixed. I'm to write my story, send it to him for correction, then I copy it and send it to an editor. That won't cost anything but stamps and paper and typewriter ribbons. Martin's going to send me his old machine, you know. I *told* you that."

"Yes, you told me that. Martin's very kind, very kind. Still, that is not like a college for you," replied Sister Sue as she turned away.

In the hall she met her father with his garden trowel in his hand. "I'm going out to do a little digging," he said. "I think I'll transplant some of those asters."

"Yes, but, Father, it's too cold," she remonstrated, gently taking the trowel away and turning him toward the stairs. "And you have n't even your hat on. Come, dearie, let's go back up to your room. You know it's September now and we can't dig so much in the garden."

"Oh, yes. I see, I see." Meekly the old man let himself be led back to his room.

It was never any trouble to make John Gilmore "see." He was always "seeing" whatever they wanted him to see. It was only that they had to make him see the same things so many times, over and over. And now that the weather was cooler and he could not be out of doors so much among his beloved flowers, he was more restless and uneasy than ever, taxing Sister Sue's tact and patience and ingenuity to the utmost.

And there also were the pupils. Unmistakably Sister Sue was finding it hard to come down to potato-peeling after her "fling at the frosting." With the exquisite notes of a Beethoven concerto played by Donald Kendall in her ears, it was much harder to listen to the bungling rendition of the day's exercise in C major played by Susie Smith.

It was all so humdrum, so hopelessly commonplace, so hopelessly of no account. Sister Sue sighed to herself at times. And when she had so hoped to make something of her life really worth while!

To Granny Preston she frequently flew for refuge.

"When I just can't stand it another minute, I have to come to you," she panted one day, dropping breathlessly into a chair. "You don't mind?"

"Mind? Of course not. I'm glad to have you. It gives *me* something to talk of besides *my* aches an' pains an' troubles."

"As if you ever let anybody know you had any!" scoffed Sister Sue.

"Pooh!" With a wave of her hand the old lady tossed this aside. "Well, child, what is it to-day? Did Susie Smith strike C instead of G, or is Miss May crying over a story the editor would n't take?"

"Neither. Oh, yes, both." Sister Sue corrected herself with a faint smile. "We always have those with us, like the poor. But, Mrs. Preston, it's really serious this time. I'm worried, and I have n't the faintest idea what to do."

"What is it?"

"Gordon."

"The school? He don't like it, I suppose."

"Oh, that's better now. He's gotten over his snobbishness. I did talk him out of that. And he's doing splendidly in his studies, too. The head master, himself, told me so. But I'm beginning to wish now he did n't like the boys quite so well. He's with them all the time, out of school hours, hanging

around the station and the hotel and Dan Bowles's pool-room."

"Why don't you have them here?"

"Here! In that tomb of a parlor with the hair-wreath and the coffin-plates? Suppose you try getting them to come!"

"I will, if you'll do what I say."

Sister Sue stared frankly. Then she gave a short laugh.

"Oh, I'll do what you say all right, I'll promise. Only I warn you, this is no case of too much soda in the pie-crust, Mrs. Preston. But I'll do what you say even if it's to give them a pink tea."

"Thanks. That's just about what I want you to do," nodded the little old lady imperturbably.

"Mrs. Preston!"

"Well?"

"You don't understand! I'm trying to tell you that the boy won't even stay at home with me! He wants to be off all the time. All he wants to do is to hang around those horrid places and smoke with the boys, and some of them are not nice boys. They smoke and drink and gamble and swear, and — Gordon is getting awful in his manner and in his language, so rough and coarse. And you talk of giving *him* a *pink tea!*"

"Gordon's all right. He's just trying to be a man among men. I know; I've had boys of my own."

"But he's always been a gentleman before," faltered the girl: "even though he has smoked cigarettes in spite of anything I would say. But never before

has he been coarse and rough and uncouth in his ways."

"H-mm. Does he dance?"

"He used to — down there in Boston — during school, of course. And they were beginning to have little dances among themselves when — when we came away."

"H-mm. Care for girls?"

Sister Sue flushed.

"I — I don't know."

"H-mm. Well, I know. He either does and owns up to it, or does and won't own up to it. I know; I've had boys of my own. I know a few other things, too. I have ways of finding out things — in this town. I know that Kitty Sanborn wanted a dance last winter and her ma would n't let her have one 'cause 't would hurt their nice new hardwood floors. And I know that Bessie Merrill wanted a party a month ago and her ma would n't let her have it 'cause 't would cost too much to feed all them young folks. And I know that Mis' White and Mis' Anderson won't let their children ever bring home company 'cause they clutter up and wear out the carpets and bang up the furniture. And I know that —"

But Sister Sue interrupted.

"You don't have to say another word — not another word!" the girl said, jumping to her feet, laughing and dancing up and down on her toes. "I know it all now. And he shall have his pink tea — you wait and see."

"Molasses candy and popcorn make a fine treat,

and they ain't a mite costly," called out Mrs. Preston as her visitor flew out of the door.

Hurrying down the back stairs, Sister Sue was muttering to herself: "Wear out the carpets and bang up the furniture! Indeed! Humph!" Going straight into the stiff, cheerless parlor she stopped and gazed at the things about her. "If I take away the hair-wreath and the coffin-plates, that will help some," she mused. Then she pulled up a shade and moved two chairs out of line. "And if I put in a few extra chairs — that will help some more."

Five minutes later, the hair-wreath under one arm and the framed coffin-plates under the other, she met May on the stairway.

"For Heaven's sake! What are you doing?" exclaimed May.

"Getting ready to give a pink tea to your brother," answered Sister Sue, proceeding on her way with a chuckle regardless of the amazed ejaculations and questions that followed her all the way to the attic.

But when she told her brother the next day she did not call it a pink tea.

"I suppose you could n't get together a big enough crowd to have a real country-style candy-pulling, could you? Say for next Wednesday evening?"

"Could n't I? Just try me and see." (As if Sister Sue did n't know that Gordon never passed any sort of a "dare"!)

"Well, how many *could* you get?"

"How many do you want?"

Sister Sue calculated rapidly. "Why, perhaps six boys and six girls."

"Done! You give us the candy to pull and I'll see that you have the crowd here to pull it."

"Good! Next Wednesday night, then, at eight o'clock," said Sister Sue. And to hear her nonchalant voice one would never suspect that she had spent hours planning just how to approach Gordon with the subject, and that she was even then quaking in her shoes lest she had said too much or not enough.

For the next few days Sister Sue was indeed busy arranging things around the house and getting her plans into shape for Wednesday night. May had declared that as for herself she would have nothing to do with any of Gordon's crowd and was surprised that her sister allowed him to invite them. She did not propose to put herself in a position where she would have to speak to every hoodlum on the street or else pretend not to see them. As it was, it was humiliating enough to have her own brother speak to them when she was walking with him.

"What do you suppose the Kendalls will think when they see Joe Anderson and his sisters with their beaus from the Whipple shops coming in here?" she asked.

"I don't know," replied Sister Sue. "I have heard that Joe Anderson won the hundred-dollar prize for the best set of housing plans for the employees of the Kendall shops and that he had been promoted to a very responsible position in the company's office. And I heard that George White had talked with the

men at the Whipple shops and persuaded them not to go on strike last week."

"Yes, I know all that," rejoined May, "and I know also that George White's brother Tom was found in a barn down on the Meadow Road dead drunk the next day after the big ball-game and the Kendalls' superintendent discharged him as soon as he heard of it. Gordon has invited *him* here, and Gordon says he has accepted the invitation."

"I have heard that story," replied Sister Sue; "Gordon told me; but Gordon does not believe that Tom was intoxicated; he thinks he had been drugged and robbed at some gambling game."

"But are you going to have him here, now, in the face of the talk about him all over town?" asked May in astonishment.

"Yes; I wrote a special note to Tom and told Gordon to make him promise he would surely come Wednesday night, that I wanted him to sing and let me play his accompaniments. You know Tom has a wonderful tenor voice," quietly explained Sister Sue.

"Oh, Sue! How could you? What will Martin say? You first neglect Martin to play Donald Kendall's accompaniments, and now, without consulting him, you propose to play accompaniments for Tom White. You must be crazy over your old piano-playing," angrily cried May.

But Sister Sue had no time for argument. She still had much to do before her work for Wednesday night was finished. May could not help now, because she must finish the manuscripts for her new story, which

Martin Kent had recently corrected and returned to her. Its title was to be "On the Mountain-Top," and Martin had written her it was the best piece of work she had ever done and any publisher would be glad to get hold of it, so she told Sister Sue the day she received it back with Martin Kent's corrections.

John Gilmore seemed much more feeble these days than he had been, though usually he had been quite contented to remain in his room with his pictures, except at times when he would suddenly start out bareheaded and inform anybody he met that he needed a little exercise and thought he would walk downtown that day to his office.

The pupils were farther advanced now and were more interested in their lessons and they were not so vexing and tedious as they had been.

And so when Wednesday night came all was ready. Sister Sue had taken out the rugs and tables and chairs from the big, wide hall, and had moved the piano to another corner in the parlor, making room for several more chairs and a few small tables. The evening was cool and the air crisp, and Delia in the kitchen was very happy with a large kettle of boiling, bubbling syrup on the stove, and plates and spoons and flour and butter on the kitchen table. Mrs. Preston had said, "Delia is a dabster at fixing up molasses for candy-pulling and popcorn balls," and so it proved.

Gordon had been true to his word and his "crowd" was all there. Three girls, Kitty Sanborn and Bessie Merrill and Grace Walker, came first. Sister Sue wel-

comed them at the door and told them to run upstairs and put their wraps in her room. Then came George White with his sister Ruth. He told Sister Sue his brother Tom had not been home since the day before, but he thought he intended to come. Joe Anderson came alone, but said his sisters were on their way with their beaus. Gordon had all the boys go to his room, where they spent more time than was necessary in fixing their ties just right and adjusting their cuffs so that exactly the proper amount of white would show. A few minutes past eight Tom White came. Sister Sue had been watching for him and was at the door to meet him.

"Good-evening, Tom," she said.

"Good-evening, Miss Gilmore. I am sorry I am late, but I had something important — that is, it was important to me — that I wanted to get before I came here," he said, "and I had to go down to the Junction to get it. I have it here," and he handed her a folded piece of paper. "Please read it, Miss Gilmore."

Sister Sue opened it and read:

mister Tom white. kendalls Supe gave us the names of his men what had dough in thare pockets we gave him five dollars a name we doped them to get thare stuff. He told us to make you good & sick & we did i no why he fired you & it was a dirty trick. if he dont put you back on your job d—— quick he will here things Show him this leter

STUBBY

p s Im the Supes bruther

"I am glad, Tom, that what we heard was not

true," said Sister Sue as she handed the note back to him.

Tom flushed, and said: "Some of it was true, Miss Gilmore. I did gamble, but I'm done. I shall ask the superintendent to write me a letter offering my old job back and saying he was mistaken in his reason for discharging me, but I shall not go back there to work nor will I show the letter to anybody unless necessary," explained Tom as he went upstairs. Just then Ed Baker and Frank Woods came, with the two Anderson girls.

By ten minutes past eight exactly six boys came downstairs in a bunch and were vainly trying to appear unconcerned while exactly six girls in the parlor immediately began to chatter and laugh as they appeared. Sister Sue told them she had been lonesome ever since Old Home Week and had wanted a little party to liven things up for her. She told them she wanted some music and singing and was very glad they could all come.

As she talked to them, she sat at the piano playing softly little alluring snatches of ragtime and old country-dance music, and she asked if they supposed there was room enough in the hall for some of them to dance while Delia was getting things ready out in the kitchen for the candy-pulling. She looked toward Gordon for a reply and he at once asked Kitty Sanborn if she would try it with him. Then Joe Anderson went over to Ruth White (who was tapping her toe in time to the music) and asked her if she would start off with him. The music was now changing into a lively

little two-step and soon four couples were forgetting their embarrassment in the witchery of the dance.

Sister Sue turned to Tom White while she was playing and asked him please to bring Grace Walker to the piano so they could talk and arrange for some songs right after giving the dancers a few more turns at the two-step.

In a few minutes the music began to slow down. The dancers clapped for more, but Sister Sue smiled and let it drift into the familiar little melodies of "Old Kentucky Home," "In the Starlight," "Music in the Air," and at a nod from her Tom and Grace began to sing "Annie Laurie," then following it with "Clementine" and "Jingle Bells," and soon the voices of the whole crowd were heard either joining in or humming at parts of the chorus until Delia appeared from the kitchen announcing:

"If you folks want to pull any candy, now's the time. And come quick!"

With the boys' "Hurrah for Delia!" and, "You bet we want to pull candy!" and the girls' excited little screams and shrieks of laughter, they all rushed into the kitchen, where Delia had two or three well-buttered plates of thick masses of soft, hot sugar ready for pulling.

"Now, some of you just get out on that back piazza; there ain't room enough for all of you in here," she told them; "I've got to have standin'-room while I learn some of you how to pull it."

Then she rubbed flour over her hands and took up one of the portions of soft, hot sugar, stretching it out

and folding it together quickly and repeating this a few times, occasionally flouring or buttering her hands lightly to prevent the sugar's sticking to them.

"Now, Joe, you an' Kitty wash your hands an' wipe 'em dry an' rub them over with flour an' take this bunch I'm doin'. Be spry about it or it'll git too cold to pull," ordered she.

"An' you, Tom White, you an' Bessie Merrill git your hands fixed for this bunch an' go out on the piazza with it. Stretch it way out, double it over an' give your end to Bessie, then stretch it ag'in an' make Bessie give you her end. Stretch it so it'll be kinder flat-like. Keep a-stretchin' and doublin' it until it begins to git kinder hard to stretch, then pull one end way out 'bout as far as you can an' as flat as you can, lay it on one of these here buttered platters an' cut it off. Then stretch out some more the same way an' cut that off. You'll have to be mighty quick or it'll git hard an' won't stretch.

"An' you, Frank, if you've got your hands washed you may pop the corn; put it in this big pan, an' we'll have some popcorn balls. I'll show you how to make 'em when you git the pan filled up. Keep the pan up there over the stove so the corn won't git cold."

Thus Delia put them to work, sending some out on the back piazza where, with shrieks and laughs and "Oh, my hands are all sticky!" and "It's hot, take it quick!" and "You almost dropped it!" they soon had a very creditable array of platters and pans covered with long strips ready to be cut up into sticks

THE GIRLS TOLD HER THEY ENJOYED THE DANCE, AND CANDY, AND EVERYTHING

and small pieces of real old-fashioned molasses candy. Delia attended to cutting it up and putting it on to smaller plates and setting it outdoors to cool. In the kitchen Frank Woods and some of the girls had made a panful of popcorn balls and these were outdoors cooling with the candy. Then the boys helped Delia wash the dishes and the girls wiped them.

Meanwhile, in the big parlor, Sister Sue had arranged the tables and chairs and had brought in some cake and lemonade, and was ready for the young people, who now were beginning to come in with plates heaped with the candy and popcorn balls of their own make. Probably never before had one of those boys or girls experienced the real fun and frolic, the jollity and genuine sport of getting together and spending an evening as they were spending that one at the old Gilmore homestead that night in October.

While they were eating and merry-making Sister Sue was lightly touching the keys of the piano, improvising little tunes and weaving into them bits of harmony from Schubert and Chopin and Liszt as she followed the moods of her guests. When they had finished their candy and cake and had drank their lemonade and were talking of going home, she asked them to give her just one more song and then she would let them go. After that, somewhat reluctantly, they went upstairs for their hats and wraps. The boys, as they came down, told Sister Sue her "party" was the "best thing ever," and that she was "all right" and "we hope you will have another one soon." The girls told her they enjoyed the dance, and candy,

and everything, and just wished they could have her to their houses sometime.

"I thank every one of you so much for coming to-night, and if you will come again I shall be very glad. You've all made me very happy and I am so glad you have enjoyed it, too," said Sister Sue to them as they went down the walk.

"You're a brick! A regular brick!" exclaimed Gordon as she closed the door, and he emphasized his statement with a hug — a very unusual thing for him to do. "I was having a tough time getting the fellows to say they would come here until I told them they could dance and do any old thing they wanted to. They took my word for it, and now the whole bunch wants to know if you'll have 'em here again."

"They may come again just as soon as you want them and as often as they want to," replied she. "Perhaps we can fix up that large chamber over the kitchen for a headquarters and you can get up some kind of a club if you want to."

"Bully good idea!" exclaimed Gordon as he started upstairs for bed. "Good-night, Sis."

"Good-night, Gordon."

And that night a very tired but a very happy little girl went to sleep with a smile on her lips and a heart full of gladness because she knew the "pink tea" had been a success.

CHAPTER XIV

A "BEST SELLER" AND A POSTPONED MARRIAGE

"TRIXIE" came out the first of November. It did not prove to be the Great American Novel, but it did become that other will-o'-the-wisp and unexplainable surprise, a "best seller." It was the sort of a book of which one person, having read it, immediately says to his neighbors on both sides of him, "Have you read 'Trixie'? Well, you want to, right away." That's the kind of book nothing can stop. The publisher, with the feeling of an engineer catching on to a train that has astonished him by starting off on its own accord, begins to advertise it widely. Half the critics laud it to the skies, while the other half either ignore it entirely or spend perfectly good time and perfectly good space, not in reviewing it, but in heaping anathemas on those who have reviewed it favorably. By December it had sold forty thousand copies. Christmas swelled it another forty thousand, and New Year's saw it still going strong with the hundred-thousand mark in sight.

Martin Kent accepted his success gratefully, even modestly in a way, though to his fiancée he did write a trifle boastfully: "What did I tell you?"

From her and from May, as from all his friends, he received hearty congratulations. May, in particular, wrote him that she was fairly green with envy. He was interviewed, dined, and banqueted. In maga-

zines and newspapers appeared his portrait together with his quoted opinion (occasionally accurate, but usually otherwise) on all manner of subjects ranging from the best time to eat apples to the worst habits of the Fiji Islanders. From all over the country came letters requesting autographs and locks of hair. Movie Men and Screen Bureaus approached him with offers; and "Trixie" drinks, cigars, pajamas, and silk stockings appeared on the market.

In February the successful author, pleased and proud, but a little dazed with it all, ran up to Gilmoreville to see his fiancée.

"I just tore myself away," he said, "and I've got to go back to-morrow. I'm guest of honor at a banquet, and I have to speak before a Woman's Club the next day. But I've been trying for so long to get here."

In the evening, when John Gilmore had been put to bed and May and Gordon had left the two lovers to themselves, Martin Kent told why especially he had come. He said that surely now there need be no further delay. He wanted to be married, and he *could* be married now that this blessed book had made it possible.

He was very tender, very affectionate. He uttered some very beautiful sentiments that would have thrilled any girl's heart and that certainly would thrill the heart of a very tired little girl who, for so long, had borne the weight of heavy, heavy burdens. And they did thrill Sister Sue, to whom all eyes had turned, all hands had reached, and all feet had run when anything under the sun was wanted.

It was with a very long sigh of utter weariness, then, but with a measure of content as well, that Sister Sue said yes, she would marry him. She would marry him in two months — yes, in one month, if he liked.

"Fine! In one month, then, please! My little sweetheart — my wife," breathed the man with a fervent kiss. "And down there with me, once away from this, we'll have those roses back in your cheeks, dearie."

"Away from this!" She drew back, startled. "Why — Martin, you know I can't leave — here —"

"Nonsense! Of course you can leave. You did n't think *I* was coming *here* to live, did you, sweetheart?"

"Why, y-yes, I did, Martin. I — I thought that was what we'd always planned." Her eyes were troubled now.

He laughed lightly.

"But plans change, you know, when circumstances change. Surely, darling, you were n't thinking of making me spend the rest of my days in Gilmoreville, were you?"

"You — you would n't want to, then, even for — for a time?"

He laughed again lightly.

"I'm afraid not, my dear."

"But you liked it — you said you liked it, last summer."

"So I did — for a visit." He frowned a bit impatiently. "But to live here is quite another matter.

Why, Sue! I'd stifle here — starve — grow mad! As for thinking of writing here — impossible! I'm sure, dear, you don't want to quite spoil my career, *now*."

"Oh! No, no. Of course not!" She spoke quickly, but her eyes were still troubled. "I was thinking, of course, of Father." She paused. The man said nothing. After a moment she went on, more slowly, "I'm afraid he won't be so contented anywhere else, and it's easier here, where he knows everybody and everybody knows him, to take care of him and keep him occupied."

"Of course, of course! I *would n't* think of moving him," said the man in cordial agreement.

The girl turned sharply.

"You — mean — you *don't* mean for us to go and leave him here?" she cried incredulously.

"But I do, dear." The man spoke pleasantly, with a cheerful, matter-of-course manner. "Your sister May is here, and Gordon, and you have Delia in the kitchen. And Mrs. Preston is right in the house. Your father will be all right, dear. Don't worry. Besides, you can run up yourself to see him now and then."

She gave an impatient gesture.

"Run up and see him, indeed!" she scorned. "Martin, *can't* you understand? Can't you see that what you ask is impossible — simply impossible? You don't know how much he depends on me. He always did even before he was sick — they all did."

"Yes, I know they did," interposed Martin Kent gently.

She paid no attention to his interruption, but went on earnestly:

"He is not quite so well now, Martin. He's more restless, more confused. Lots of times he does n't know where he is, has to be told, led out of doors and down the street, and then led back, just to show him he really *is* at home, you know. And I have to do that always. Delia can't, of course, and May and Gordon can't. They have n't the patience. Why, Martin! I could n't leave him with May. She would n't consent, ever. Besides, she has her own work to do and she loves it. I don't want *her* life spoiled. I want her to do something worth while. She's too young, anyway, to be left like that with all the cares.

"Even if it was n't for Father, there's Gordon. You don't know, but Gordon was — was getting in a bad way, rough and coarse and out nights, and hanging around hotels and pool-rooms. But I've changed all that. May says this place is a regular clubhouse now — and I suppose it is, but I don't care. We've fitted up a big room upstairs with tables and games and books and magazines and an old billiard-table; and almost always some of the boys are there. And we have sings and candy-pulls and dances downstairs. You should hear me play ragtime and dance music! I never thought I could, but I do. Oh, I make them hear good music, too, and they're getting to like it. We've started a little orchestra; Gordon plays the bass viol — he loves it. But if I went away all this would stop and — he'd

go back, I know he'd go back, to those awful pool-rooms again. Martin, don't you see? I can't leave them here — I can't. I shall have to take them with me. Can't you see that I shall?"

"No, I can't." Impatiently the man got to his feet and began to move restlessly up and down the room. Then abruptly he stopped and faced her.

"Sweetheart, *can't* you see that that is exactly what I want — to get you away from it all? You are wearing yourself all out. You've done enough. Let some one else take the burden now."

"Martin!"

"Yes, I know you think I'm urging you to do something wrong and selfish. But it's not that way at all. *They're* selfish themselves to want you to give up your whole life to them. Oh, yes, I know they depend on you. They always have. It's been, 'Sister Sue'll do it.' 'Sister Sue'll go.' 'Sister Sue'll stay.' But it's time all that was stopped. It's time Sister Sue had more chance to live her own life."

She smiled a little wistfully.

"Yes, I know. I sometimes have longed for a rest, just a little rest for a little while, but some one must do these things. What you say sounds all very pretty, but, Martin, you know as well as I do that there are some things that have to be done. I *was* going to live my own life — until that day when Father was brought home unconscious. Everything changed then. It had to change, Martin."

"Yes, yes. I understand," admitted the man irritably. "But that was then. Things are different

now. 'Trixie' had n't made a hit then. *I* was n't in a position to do anything then. I am now. I want you and I need you. I *need* you for incentive, inspiration. Seems to me you ought to consider *me* and my needs a little."

"Oh, Martin!" She smiled at him reproachfully.

"Well, I do. I'm considering you. Seriously, dear, now listen. I want you to get away, quite away, from all this care. And it can be done — if you'll only be sensible and reasonable. If the people here can't take proper care of your father, we'll find a good sanitarium somewhere that can. Gordon will soon be going to college, and May 'll be getting married. Until then they may stay with us."

"Thank you, Martin." The girl's voice trembled a little, though she was speaking now very quietly. "But Father would not be happy in a sanitarium, and to be away from me, too. Martin, I *can't* do that. I shall have to have him where I can look after him myself."

"But how can you stand it, dear, to see him like that? So broken and childish — not himself at all? I can't. It makes me positively ill. It unfits me for — everything. I can't bear —"

"You won't have to, Martin," interrupted the girl very quietly, but very pleasantly. "Come, we won't talk any more about it, please. It cannot do any good; you know we cannot possibly agree. As Father is now I can't marry you, for I can't leave him. Now, let's talk of something else — your book, your work, what you are doing that 's new and interesting."

"But — but — dearest —"

"No — please, Martin. Don't let us spoil the whole of this one evening we are together." Determinedly and with brisk cheerfulness she began to talk of "Trixie" and the curious letters that had come to him from all over the country.

When he had gone an hour later, she still carried the same air of brisk cheerfulness upstairs to her room. She even hummed a meaningless little tune, just such a little tune as one would hum if one was trying very hard not — to — think.

CHAPTER XV

REVELATIONS

FEBRUARY passed and March came. "Trixie" had reached the hundred-thousand mark now — and was still selling, so Martin Kent wrote. Martin Kent's letters to his fiancée were still frequent, still affectionate, still brightly full of his doings and of the honors being showered upon him. He was tenderly solicitous of her health and welfare — but he said nothing whatever about being married.

Sister Sue's letters in return were also frequent, affectionate, and frequently full of the doings and sayings in the Gilmore household — but they also said nothing whatever about marriage. The subject was tacitly tabooed.

In Gilmoreville Sister Sue pursued her daily round with at least a semblance of serenity and good cheer. In reality she was still humming that meaningless little tune of — the woman who does not want to *think*. She was so busy, however, through the day that she had little time to think, and she was so tired when it came night that her insistent counting of sheep jumping over a wall usually brought the desired sleep.

And Sister Sue was, indeed, busy. The number of her pupils had increased, and she was teaching in the Gilmoreville Graded School, as well as in the school at the Junction — ten miles away. In a rash moment of sympathy for a much-harassed minister, she had

taken upon herself the playing of the piano for the Sunday-School. The rehearsals of her home-talent orchestra made still more demands on her time, to say nothing of the increasing popularity of her sings and candy-pulls. Even May had to be counted in for no small share of attention, for May was already trying to sell her stories, and when they came back, flanked with their cruel rejection slips, there was no one quite like Sister Sue to soothe her, and give her comfort and sympathy and to put those undiscerning editors where they belonged with a few well-chosen words of sharp, stinging rebuke which May only wished they could have heard.

And above all else, always there was for Sister Sue the childish old man, who was growing day by day more exacting.

Indeed, there was no doubt that Sister Sue was busy that winter in Gilmoreville. She told Mrs. Preston sometimes that she was very, very busy peeling those potatoes; that she would n't mind her backaches and headaches if she were only doing something really worth while. But to be so utterly weary and then have nothing to show for it but a pan of peeled potatoes — ! And then she would make up a wry little face and shrug her shoulders and, with a merry twinkle in her eyes, glance over to Mrs. Preston, who would always remark: "I'm a-thinkin' more folks is needin' potatoes ter-day than turkey." Then both of them would laugh.

But it all helped and made it easier to go back to the potato-peeling.

In June Gordon was graduated from the High School. He was valedictorian of his class. His sister was proud of him and told him so. He was eighteen years old that spring. He had told Sister Sue that he had carefully considered the matter from all sides and had decided not to go to college. He was going into business, he said. And he said it with a very brave show of meaning it, too, but she was not so easily deceived by his words. She detected the "Oh, I wish I could go" under his effort to appear indifferent.

So Sister Sue laughed and said "Nonsense!" That he was going to do no such thing; that she could arrange beautifully now to send him, she was sure, if he would n't mind being a little economical and did n't choose too expensive a college and would perhaps help a little himself.

And Gordon kissed her (a quite extraordinary tribute for him to pay) and said she was a peach, and a brick, and he'd wanted to go all the time, only he did n't want to be a selfish pig about it. And of course he'd help pay his way. He'd black boots, or wait on tables, or shovel paths, or anything — She'd see! He said he *could* begin this summer to earn some money, but, in thinking it over, he did n't believe he would after all. Better start fresh in the fall. Besides, he had another chance to go camping this summer where he had such a good time last year, and he knew Sister Sue would want him to do that. And Sister Sue said, "Yes, yes, indeed! Of course!"

And so on the first of July he went.

Martin Kent came the sixth. All the spring he had been writing his fiancée that he was coming to Gilmoreville for a vacation. He said it was just the place he needed, and he was really looking forward to the quiet of the old town with its quaint, comfortable Inn. To say nothing of his longing to see her — his dear sweetheart.

He arrived at five o'clock, and at eight o'clock he walked down the long, elm-shaded street leading to the big, white colonial house known as the old Gilmore homestead. Sister Sue was first to see him coming. She was sitting on the veranda with May and her father. She gave one comprehensive look at the tall figure exhibiting so unmistakably the handiwork of a city tailor, even at that distance, then she hurriedly rose to her feet.

"Come, Father. It's time we were going in, I think." And she took firm hold of his arm.

"Oh, no. I don't want to go in," he said gently, but decidedly.

"But we'll have to. Come, Father, come!" she cried. "Please come, quick!" And so urgent was her voice this time that it penetrated even the befogged brain of the mumbling old man, and he rose as if impelled by some hidden force. They were well out of sight, indoors, by the time the tall, well-groomed figure of the man came up the walk.

It seemed to Sister Sue, afterwards, that this little incident was portentous of all the experiences that followed during the next few weeks. As the days passed, always she was luring her father into the

house, or upstairs, or out of doors, somewhere, anywhere, so that he might not offend the eyes of Martin Kent with his undesired presence. (All day Sister Sue might hum those meaningless little tunes so that she might not think — *think* — *think;* yet she always was remembering what Martin Kent had said about seeing her father. She did not have to think to remember that!)

Sometimes it seemed to her as if the task of keeping her father and Martin Kent apart was an impossible one. For a considerable time now John Gilmore had been showing himself more and more averse to being left alone. He wanted always to be with somebody. If left alone in his own room, it would n't be long before he would be seeking Sister Sue or May or Gordon, or even Delia in the kitchen. Only in his flower garden was he content to be by himself. And it was there, whenever possible, that his daughter would lead him at sight of Martin Kent coming down the street or up the walk. Fortunately, however, night found the old man very tired and he was always ready to go to bed early. For Sister Sue it left the evenings free from her ever-present fear that her father would walk into the room to show his box of paper pictures or to ask if she would n't please take him home, saying that he wanted to go home soon. The latter meant always that, if he was to be made happy, the two of them must put on their hats (and coats if necessary) and walk up or down the street and across to the other side, coming back again to their own doorway, which never failed then to elicit a contented "Oh, I'm so

glad to get home," from the weary man at Sister Sue's side.

But it was this, all this, that Sister Sue did not want to happen in Martin Kent's presence. Hence her ceaseless endeavors to have her father well out of the way and happily occupied when her lover was in the house.

Not that Martin Kent himself said anything to make this necessary. On the contrary, he was always very pleasant, even gently cordial when, in spite of Sister Sue's vigilance, he and John Gilmore sometimes met. He often inquired, too, very solicitously, for his health. But Martin Kent was very affable, very gracious, in all his ways these days. He was all tenderness and sympathy for Sister Sue when he found her so tired in the evenings, and he was tireless in his efforts to help May in her short-story writing. May told Sister Sue he was perfectly lovely, and not spoiled a bit by all his wonderful success, and he was *such* a help to her! And Sister Sue smiled and said she was glad, very glad.

And Sister Sue really was glad. She was glad not only to have May so aided in her work, but she was glad that there was some one in the house who could help entertain Martin Kent and make up for her own delinquencies as a hostess. For with her father and her pupils Sister Sue was finding very little time to give to Martin Kent except the evenings. And Martin Kent was often there through the day. He liked the cozy, vine-shaded veranda, and he liked to help May all he could, he said. Besides, there was a chance,

once in a while, that he might occasionally catch a peep at Sister Sue! he declared. So almost every day he came to sit on the vine-shaded veranda with May. Not that he always sat there. Quite frequently he suggested a walk. He said it was cooler up on the hill in the pine grove back of the house, and they could work up there better. That there was not the same chance up there of "catching a peep" at Sister Sue evidently did not occur to him.

But it did occur to Sister Sue. She was ashamed to admit it, even to herself. But a great many things were occurring to Sister Sue these days, instigated, she very well knew, by the chance sentences that had come to her ears one recent Sunday when she was on the way out of Sunday-School where she had been playing the piano for the singing. In front of her were two slow-moving teachers, and she was obliged to slacken her own eager steps for a moment. And it was at that moment that the sentence floated back to her.

"It was Sister Sue — yes — that played — And he's engaged to her — but everybody says they should think 't was the other one — the way they're gallivanting off together all the time."

Unseen, Sister Sue slipped to one side through the crowd and waited until the two women were quite out of sight. Then she came down the steps and walked home — a little hurriedly and her cheeks pinker than usual.

Silly gossip, of course. But what a pity! Must she forbid their going out at all together without a chap-

eron? She had never thought it necessary before to have a chaperon in this little country town, their own home town as well. And Martin Kent, the child's future brother-in-law, too! What a shame that idle tongues should try to make capital out of a simple daylight walk to the little pine grove on the hill back of their own home! And, too, when they obviously went with books in their hands to study there; and very plainly in an effort to get away from the tiresome thumping of her pupils at those eternal scales and five-finger exercises! How absurd! How wicked, too! Gossip like that always hurt a girl! It was a shame!

But to stop it; that was the problem. To say in so many words, you must not talk nor walk together any more. Oh, she could not do that! She never could! Why, it would look as if she distrusted them and was cheaply jealous of her own sister! And if she explained, told them about the gossip, that would be worse. It would make them self-conscious and — and impossible to be together. It would entirely spoil their frank comradeship, and of course put a stop to the "lessons" with all their wonderful aid and encouragement to May. And what a pity to do all that just because of a silly bit of gossip!

Of course, if there were any truth in it —

And just here it came to her with almost blinding force — *What if it were true?* What if they had begun to care for each other? What if — But that was absurd, of course. She would not so misjudge them. Certainly she could drive such unworthy thoughts from her mind.

But this was just what she found she could not do. In spite of her determination and her scornful denials to herself, she found herself watching, always watching, whenever she saw them together. She found herself inventing excuses to go out on the veranda when her sister and Martin Kent were there, and she found herself knowing the minute they left the house for a walk to the pine grove on the hill, and watching the clock till they returned.

And she saw:

That Martin Kent's eyes lighted up when May came into the room, and that they followed her as she moved about; that he deferred to May's wishes and whims and opinions on all occasions; that he worried as to whether May was too warm or too cold, when it never seemed to occur to him that his fiancée might need a fan or an extra wrap; and that he and May had many little jokes and laughs together in which she herself had no part.

Not that any of these things of themselves were so very great, she told herself, but they were significant, and she admitted that. She began to admit something else, too. Would it, after all, be so very strange if Martin Kent did turn to her sister May? May was young, pretty, and very attractive. May had no cares. She was free to be with him whenever he wanted her. Moreover, there was the great bond of their common literary interests. They could spend hours talking plots, local color, and atmosphere. While as for herself —!

Sister Sue studied herself in the mirror one day.

She flung the shade far up and let the sunlight in, and she was shocked. Undeniably she was looking old and careworn. She had grown thinner since coming to Gilmoreville, and the little hollows in her cheeks and the dark circles under her eyes were not becoming. Her hair showed lack of care, and not the simplicity of taste in arrangement, but the simplicity of haste — which is quite different in effect. Her dress, too, was plainly selected for its durability and not for its attractiveness. She remembered that she did n't have leisure to give Martin Kent whenever he sauntered over in search of companionship and amusement. The house — her father — a pupil, always there was something to detain her. And when evening came she was so utterly worn out with it all that very likely she *was* stupid and unattractive. Moreover, she did not have that "community of interest" with Martin. Plots, local color, atmosphere, bored her only to a degree less, perhaps, than her music bored him. He had never cared much for music. It might not, then, be so very strange, after all, if Martin Kent should turn to her sister May.

Prepared, however, as Sister Sue was for the thing, it came to her as a distinct shock when she came into the living-room late one afternoon and found May in Martin Kent's arms. With a little cry from May they sprang apart. Then May stood looking from one to the other, biting her lips and twisting her fingers nervously. The man's face had grown first colorless, then a dark, painful red. With a very obvious effort he began to speak, his eyes on the girl in the

doorway who had stopped short and was standing there now quietly, her face a little white.

"There is n't anything — I — I can't, *Sister Sue,*" implored the man.

Sister Sue stirred suddenly. It was as if the familiar appeal of "Sister Sue" had cleared away a fog of indecision. She came forward at once, at the same time slipping a ring from the third finger of her left hand. Very faintly she smiled.

"No, there is nothing you can say, Martin, except what you have said. It is — 'Sister Sue.'" She dropped the ring on to the table by which he stood, then turned and left the room swiftly.

That evening, on the veranda, when it was so dark one's face could not be plainly seen, May came to her and dropped on a low stool at her feet.

"Sue, won't you just let me — talk to you?" she faltered.

"Why, certainly. Talk all you like." Sister Sue's voice was calmly expressionless.

"I know there is n't anything I can say — not anything," choked the girl, "that will do — do any real good, or take away the — the awfulness of the thing. But I — I want you to know that — that — what you saw to-day — never happened before. It — it was the first time — and we — we were — were just as much surprised as you were."

"Were you!"

"Oh, I know, I know!" exclaimed May feverishly. "Nothing I can say will seem to do any good, when you *saw* with your own eyes. But, Sister Sue, listen.

Thoughtless, and silly, and selfish, and everything else that I am that's bad and foolish, I don't *lie*. You know I don't lie. You *do* know that?"

"Yes. I know that, May."

"Well; then you must believe me when I say that that was the first time — what you saw — and that we never realized where we were drifting, until — until it was right on us, or that we cared — that way. And I want you to know that we're going to kill it — both of us. I'm going away."

"Nonsense, child! You'll do no such thing! As if I'd let you!"

"But, Sister Sue, we're in earnest, really. We're not going to meet again for a long, long time. Martin is going to write to you and — and explain — and ask you to forgive and forget and take back the ring. And he's going to bow in the dust. He said he was."

Sister Sue gave a short laugh.

"And does he think I want a lover — that he picks out of the dust? No, May. All that is impossible, quite impossible. You'll see it yourself after a little thought. Do you think for an instant that I would want to marry a man who cared for another woman, and that woman my sister who cared for him, too? Don't be absurd, May!"

"But we're so sorry! so heartbroken!"

"You should n't be. You should be glad that you've found it out before it's too late. I am."

"Are you, really?"

"Very glad. It would have been unfortunate, you

know, if you had found it out after he had married me."

"But it looks — as if we'd been so false —" quivered May. "And, truly, Sister Sue, we never thought — we never dreamed — of such a thing," she hurried on feverishly. "And it was over such a silly little thing that we — we found out. I got a splinter in my finger out on the board fence when reaching through for nasturtiums, and when I came in I found Martin here, and I asked him to get it out, and he did, and — and — Honestly, Sister Sue, I *don't* know how it happened, but all of a sudden he had me in his arms and — and was kissing me and — and saying things. Then — you came. Oh! Sister Sue, it was awful! What did you think? And we were just as surprised as you were. But I know now that it — it's been coming on a long time with me. I always liked him, and thought he was perfectly lovely. Then when he began to help me, and we had such a lot of things to talk about — I know now that I was always watching for him, and that I was never so happy as when with him, and he says it's been the same way with him, too. He found himself watching for me and waiting for me, and glad when we could be off by ourselves. He told me that to-day — after you — you went away. But right off — we — we agreed that we'd kill it, and we will, Sister Sue, because I'm sure we can! Oh! We're going to try so hard and —"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Sister Sue, rousing herself briskly. "Don't talk that way any more, May. When I dropped that ring on the table I dropped

myself quite out of Martin Kent's life — except, of course, as 'Sister Sue,'" she amended with a slight lift of the eyebrows. "Now, come. We know what is to be done. The only thing left is to decide how and when to do it. You will be married, of course. The sooner, the better, I think, under the circumstances, which will suit Martin Kent, I am sure. He wanted to marry me last March, so he'll be ready; merely a change in brides, that's all."

"*Sister Sue!* You — you're awful!"

"Awful? Not a bit of it. I *hope* I'm sensible. That's all."

"But — but Martin is going to write you."

"Very well. I'll answer. And he'll like my letter. Never fear. This is n't a penny dreadful or a stage melodrama that we're living, you know. There'll be no hysterics or heroics. We shall conduct the matter with dignity and with as little cause for gossip as is possible. You will go away to live, of course. I'm glad of that. It would n't be so easy to keep tongues quiet if you were here as a perpetual reminder."

"But — Sister Sue. *You?*" faltered May.

"Don't worry about me." Sister Sue's lips came together a bit grimly. "As I told you, there'll be no hysterics or heroics, and I shan't die of a broken heart. Never fear."

"Sister Sue, I — I think you're *wonderful!*" breathed the younger girl.

"Wonderful? Not a bit of it! I — I'm just Sister Sue, that's all."

"Sue, Sue, Sister Sue — are you out here?" queried

a man's voice from the doorway. Even her father called her "Sister Sue" sometimes.

"Yes, Father. I'm coming." With a sigh that was quickly stifled, Sister Sue got to her feet and went into the house.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME READJUSTMENTS

GRIMLY Sister Sue faced the thing. Calmly she thrashed it out in her mind. There would, indeed, be no hysterics or heroics. She was not that kind. She thanked Heaven for that. Besides, when one comes right down to it, the thing — what she was doing — was not so different from what she had been doing all her life. She was merely substituting a lover for the larger apple or the bigger piece of cake, and letting little sister have it. That was all. Surely, she ought to be used to that sort of thing by *this* time!

To be sure, it was not exactly soothing to one's pride to be thus so lightly tossed aside for a younger, fairer face! There would be a slight period of rather painful readjustment. There was bound to be that.

Women, like the two gossips coming out of Sunday-School that day, would love to roll the thing over their tongues and nod "I told you so" to each other. She must expect that. Other people, their own friends and acquaintances, might stare and marvel a little at the metamorphosis in the bride. That, also, was to be expected. But at the worst it would be but a nine days' wonder, soon over. Then some other matter somewhere would claim their attention.

As for her own feelings in the matter — Sister Sue was experiencing the realization of a curious phenomenon; where before, ever since her talk with Martin

Kent in February about leaving her father, she had been trying hard not to think, *think*, THINK, of Martin Kent, she was now conscious of no such effort on her part. She was quite willing to think of him. He seemed already a being quite apart from her life. She was amazed, and a little troubled, that she *could* think of him in that way so calmly — so almost indifferently. Was she, then, so cold-hearted, so fickle-minded? Surely, when one's lover failed one so utterly as to —

Like a flash in the dark there came the explanation why she, ever since February, had been mentally humming the meaningless little tunes so as not to think, *think*, THINK of Martin Kent, and why now she could think of him so calmly, so indifferently.

It was not now that her lover had failed her. (A thing that was already black could not become blacker.) She knew now that it was in February that he had really failed her; in February when he had pleaded for an immediate marriage, peremptorily suggesting a sanitarium for her father, and at the same time so unmistakably indicating his own abhorrence of the presence so dear to her. She knew now why something had seemed to snap within her at that time. She knew now why she had then grown so numb and cold, and why from that moment she had always unconsciously been putting the thought of Martin Kent as far from her as possible. She knew now why, when she saw his arms about her sister, there was n't the sharp stab of a new hurt, but the dull ache of an old one. For that matter, as she

looked back at it, she could now see that from the very day of the catastrophe that had brought such changes into her life Martin Kent had continuously been found wanting when put to the test of real aid and comfort. She knew that always in her own mind she had been finding excuses for him, always she had been either telling herself that it was "just Martin's way," or she had been trying to put some word or action of his quite out of her thoughts. As she looked back at it, there had, for a long time, been this growing sense of hurt and disappointment which had now culminated in a thing that precluded excuse and that most certainly could not be dismissed with a placating "Oh, that's just Martin's way." She still felt, however, that it was not now that she had lost her lover, but months ago on that day in February, just as she felt that no matter when her father should die she had really lost him on the day he was brought home unconscious from the office.

As for May — Martin Kent would very likely make May happy. Certainly she hoped he would. They would at least have the same interests, and May had no household cares or filial duties to prevent his taking her where he liked.

There remained, then, only the readjustment of matters so as to make as little commotion and talk as possible in Gilmoreville.

In the morning came Martin Kent's note by special messenger. It was a beautiful note. Not for nothing was Martin Kent a fiction writer. He did, as May had predicted, bow himself to the dust. He did not

attempt to offer explanations or excuses. He declared that he could n't do that. It would be useless. But he was all contrition, all shame in his supplication for mercy and forgiveness. And in the end he begged, would she not take back his ring and wear it?

Sister Sue answered immediately. Her note was not beautiful. It contained no heroics and no thrills. Sister Sue was not a fiction writer. It contained no bemoanings, no reproaches. It was cheerful, matter of fact, and cordially interested in plans for his and May's happiness. It said, no, thank you, she did not care to wear the ring again, and she was very glad the true state of affairs had been found out before it was too late. It said, also, that there was no reason why he and May should not be married as soon as May's simple trousseau could be made ready, and that he need feel no hesitation in coming to the house with the old freedom and informality, and that she really hoped he would come soon.

And she signed herself, "Sister Sue."

And Sister Sue did hope he would come soon. She longed to get over the awkwardness of that first meeting. After that it would be easier, she knew.

She was glad, therefore, when two days later Delia told her that Mr. Kent was in the living-room and wanted to see her. She went down at once. She gave him a cordial hand and smiled straight into his eyes, and she promptly hushed the rush of words on his lips. After a very little while she took him out on to the veranda where May was waiting; then she left them with the cheery suggestion that they'd better

be making their plans or the summer would be gone before they knew it.

After all, it proved to be even less difficult than Sister Sue had feared. Matters at home seemed hardly to change at all except that it was May now, instead of herself, that spent the evenings on the veranda with Martin Kent. The daytime hours May had always spent with him, anyway. True, the explanations to her father and Gordon were not easy, and certain other words had to be given out in various quarters. These, too, were not easy. As for Gilmoreville, Sister Sue simplified matters there by saying to Mrs. Preston: "My sister May and Mr. Kent are going to be married in September. If any person says to you that they supposed it was I who was to marry Mr. Kent, do you suppose you could answer very lightly, something like this: 'Sister Sue the one? Oh, no, it's May. Oh, there was a fancied something once — perhaps — between the other two — but that's all over now. May is the one'; could you do that, Mrs. Preston?"

"Could I?" The little old lady threw a keen glance into Sister Sue's face. "You just wait and see. An' I'm thinkin' I'd be addin' that whatever it was between Martin Kent an' Sister Sue, it did n't never come to much, I guessed, or else Sister Sue would n't be so happy an' gay over fixin' up her sister to marry him."

"I thought I could trust you," laughed Sister Sue as she turned away.

And she could, as Mrs. Preston soon proved. For

it was in a measure true, as Gordon had once asserted, that whatever Granny Preston knew the whole town knew, but it was also true that the town knew only what Granny Preston chose to tell it. And in this particular case Granny Preston's words were chosen with great care and discrimination.

After all, even in Gilmoreville, it was only a nine days' wonder, and long before the day set for the wedding Sister Sue knew that she had ceased to be the cynosure of every curious eye the minute she appeared on the street.

Even had it been otherwise, however, Sister Sue was much too busy to pay attention to what Gilmoreville was thinking or saying, for Sister Sue was trying to create a trousseau attractive enough to suit May's particular taste and inexpensive enough to be encompassed by the slender funds at her command. And it was no small problem. But it was not the first struggle Sister Sue had had with "clothes." From the days of their affluence, when the tailors and dressmakers and unlimited credit at the shops had been a matter of course, they had brought with them to Gilmoreville a well-filled wardrobe which, by the skill Sister Sue had developed in remodeling, had served them so well that few garments had had to be bought thus far. But the supply was getting low now. There were, however, two or three evening dresses and a somewhat faded pink challis, from which, with a few packages of dye, some new patterns, and Mrs. Preston's help, Sister Sue had evolved three very pretty little frocks which found a measure of ap-

proval even in May's critical eyes. This left most of the money at Sister Sue's command to go for shoes and gloves and hats, and, by going without the new suit she had planned for herself, she was enabled to provide a trousseau that May said would "pass" — albeit she said it with so obvious a discontent that Sister Sue opened her lips as if she had something she wanted very much to say. But she did not say it. There were a good many times these days that Sister Sue was opening her lips — and then not saying it.

The wedding took place on the third day of September. It was a very simple but a very pretty one. Beth Henderson came on to be bridesmaid, and two or three other Boston friends came also. It was said at the wedding that Sister Sue looked fully as radiantly happy as the bride. And perhaps she did. Sister Sue understood very well that she could n't expect Granny Preston to do *all* her fighting for her. And Sister Sue particularly wanted to look happy at that wedding.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin Kent left on the afternoon train for a brief honeymoon trip, after which they were to go to Boston to live. Three days after the wedding Gordon left for college. He told Sister Sue that she was a brick to let him go, and that he was going to help — oh, he was going to help a whole lot, waiting on tables, shoveling paths, anything. But surely *something*.

When he had gone Sister Sue sat down and drew a long breath; but she did not sit long; her father called her, and said he had lost his shears and could not find them anywhere. He thought perhaps Sister

Sue could find them for him. Sister Sue then got up quietly and went to look for the shears. There were other things, too, which her father had lost, and some things which he had found and cut which he should not have found and cut. Two buttons were off his coat, too, and his linen looked shabby. In fact, very plainly the old gentleman showed that the thoughtful and loving care usually bestowed upon him must have been absent for some weeks past.

"My! But I guess we've got to be tended to now," said Sister Sue brightly as she rummaged her workbasket for two black coat buttons. "But never mind, dearie. They're all gone now, and there's just our two selves here."

Gradually, as September passed, Sister Sue got back "into the harness," as she expressed it. Her pupils came and she welcomed them eagerly. Sister Sue was counting her money very carefully these days, and every new dollar helped. The wedding and the first payment toward Gordon's college expenses had made no small hole in Sister Sue's savings and she was beginning to worry a little about the future. If they should have a big doctor's bill! And there was the fuel for the furnace! And if Gordon was to be put through college nobody knew how much would have to be paid out for him.

With all this, and more, in mind, Sister Sue began to economize in her household matters even more rigorously than ever. Gordon and May being gone, she told herself she could do it. There were now only her father and herself to feed, besides Delia, and

they could have very simple food, the cheaper cuts of meat, and no rich pies or cake. She should not go out much, so she would need but little in the way of clothing. What she had, indeed, with careful mending and managing, would probably do very nicely for the present. She wished she could let Delia go, but that was hardly possible — not if she kept her pupils, and certainly to let her pupils go would be the height of folly. She could close part of the house. That would be a *good* idea, and very promptly she put it into effect. By moving the piano into the living-room, and changing her own bedroom to the little chamber next her father's, she was enabled to shut up the greater part of the rambling old house, which left much less to heat and care for. She settled down then for the winter. When the early December snows came and piled high around the doors and windows, she wrote May and Gordon that she was as snug as a bug in a rug. She said nothing about the gloomy, half-closed house, the mended suit, and the simple meals, however.

It was not an easy winter. The snow came early and stayed late. It drifted deep through the roadways, and almost defied Mr. Preston to keep the paths open for the children coming to their lessons. Sister Sue went out but little. Twice her father fell sick with severe colds, and once Delia was shut up in her room for a week with a bad throat. Sister Sue thought her days were full before, but she soon learned there is nothing quite so elastic as a busy day to encompass yet other tasks.

From May came glowing letters telling of a whirl of gayety among new friends and old. Running through them was only one thread of disappointment. Martin's new book, "The Unknown Highway," was somehow not seeming to "catch on." The advance sales had been fair, but there were almost no re-orders, and the booksellers reported overloaded shelves with few sales after the first spurt. Moreover, the reviews had not been at all satisfactory, and the general report was that people did not like the book. May said that *that* was absurd! That she just loved the book, and so did all the rest of their friends that she had asked about it. Anyhow, they said so.

From Gordon, also, came glowing letters telling of gay times and winter sports. At the bottom of almost every letter he said he was awfully sorry, but he had n't yet found a decent job — at waiting on tables. But it was coming — oh, it was coming. Once he wrote that he *had* tried shoveling, but it made his arms so lame that he was unfitted for study the next day, and of course he knew Sister Sue would n't want him to do *that!* In the meantime he was awfully sorry, but he was afraid he would have to ask for a little more money if Sister Sue could spare it.

And of course Sister Sue spared it.

To Sister Sue, as the winter passed, the days came to be one endless round of dreariness and monotony. Sometimes she cried. Sometimes in the privacy of her own room she stormed hotly at the cruel turn the Fates had played her — though always she was ashamed of this, and afterwards she usually would do

contrite penance by some special tenderness shown her father. Sometimes to Mrs. Preston she would say that the pan of potatoes she was peeling did n't seem to lower much notwithstanding her long labors. But she said this, as both knew, merely to get the comfort of Mrs. Preston's swift response:

"Never mind. Petaters is petaters, an' 'way ahead o' turkey when ye come right down ter bein' necessary!"

Sister Sue still fled to her piano when time permitted, for rest and refreshment of soul. But she never lay awake nights now, visioning herself as bowing to entranced multitudes, though still in her dreams sometimes she heard the clamorous call of "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore! Encore!"

CHAPTER XVII

ONE WEEK IN JUNE

From the south came warm breezes and gentle rains. Higher and higher in the heavens rolled the sun. The huge drifts disappeared and were not. Here and there a bit of green flashed back smile for smile. Little brown, brave-hearted buds swelled to bursting with the promise of good things to come.

And it was spring.

Gilmoreville said never had they known such a winter. Never did they want to see its like again, and never had spring looked so good to them. All of which Sister Sue in the old Gilmore homestead echoed quite fervently.

And spring did, indeed, bring to Sister Sue a most welcome respite from many things. There were no more frozen water-pipes; no more shivering mornings with the fire almost out; no more blizzards that threatened to cut them off from all mankind. There was now, instead, the never-failing interest for John Gilmore in the garden which gave the shears (and Sister Sue) a rest. There were sunshine, soft air, singing birds, and the wonderful marvel that spring always is — after winter.

Sister Sue drew a long breath, shook off the lethargy that seemed to have benumbed her senses for months past, gloried in summer frocks and low shoes (even though they were a bit old and shabby), and

said she was glad she was living, anyway. Such is the magic of spring — after winter.

May wrote that she was coming home in June. She was n't a bit well, she said, and she presumed very likely the country air would be good for her. Martin thought so. The baby was coming in October, she said. She should n't come back to town, of course, until after that. Martin would come with her to Gilmoreville, but he was n't planning to stay at all. He had a wonderful chance to go on a three months' camping trip down in Maine. And he was going. He *ought* to get some good copy, he said. Anyhow, he needed the trip to freshen up. He 'd had a hard winter. But he would not be in Gilmoreville. Sister Sue need n't plan for him, therefore, but she might plan for herself to be there in June and to remain until after October, anyway. And she was her affectionate sister May.

Sister Sue read this letter and bit her lips and sat thinking for some time. She had just reached the decision that, yes, she would write her sister May that she might come, when, upon a second reading of the letter, she discovered that this would be an unnecessary formality. May had already written that she was coming.

From Gordon that week came a letter saying that some friends had asked him to go with them on a motor trip through Canada, and if she did n't mind he guessed he 'd go. He 'd come home, of course, first. He 'd have to do that, anyway, for some new clothes. His old clothes were in an awful shape. Could he have

some new ones, somehow? Of course, being on a motor trip, he would n't need so many as he would for — for a trip to Palm Beach, say — but he'd simply got to have something.

And Sister Sue wrote back promptly that he could, of course he could. He would have to have what was necessary, certainly. Then she went upstairs to the attic and took out the despised old challis that had been discarded as quite impossible when May's trousseau had been planned.

"I could dye it, I think," mused Sister Sue, eyeing it critically. Then she gathered it into her arms and carried it downstairs.

It was one evening early in June, before either Gordon or May had arrived, that Sister Sue, sitting alone on the veranda, heard a quick foot coming up the walk. She turned to see Donald Kendall coming up the steps.

"Why, Mr. Kendall, I did not know you were in town!" she exclaimed, getting at once to her feet.

"I was n't till four o'clock to-day. Thank you, I will sit down," he said, accepting a chair at the invitation of her hand.

He sat down. Sister Sue waited for him to speak, but as he still remained silent, she hazarded:

"Is your mother well?"

"Eh? What? Oh, I beg pardon. Yes, quite well. Thank you," he added, plainly as an afterthought.

There was another silence. In her corner Sister Sue smiled — quietly. She opened her lips once as if to speak, but she closed them again with no word said.

After a time the man stirred restlessly.

"You don't mind if I smoke?" he questioned.

"Not at all."

"Thanks."

Another silence — a longer one. The man had something to do now.

He stayed, perhaps, half an hour. He talked a little — a very little. Sister Sue, still smiling in her corner, met him halfway, cordially, but inasmuch as the most of the subjects introduced were discussed by him with a short "yes" or "no," or, "I don't know," she did not attempt any lengthy discussion.

It was not until he rose abruptly to go that she learned the real intent of his visit.

"Miss Gilmore, I suppose I was — well — er — perhaps a bit rude to you on that last morning before I went away after Old Home Day. I'm sorry." His lips snapped tight shut with the irritability of a man performing an annoying duty. Then, still irritably, he said: "Miss Gilmore, I expect to be around here about a week. If quite convenient to you I'll be over here to-morrow morning at nine o'clock — with my violin. That is, I mean, may I?" he amended, with the impatience of one not accustomed to asking favors.

Sister Sue laughed merrily.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kendall, but you may n't, not at nine o'clock," she smiled. "I have pupils all the morning and most of the afternoon, but I'll be glad to have you come in the evening, as early as seven, if you like."

"Thanks. I'll be here."

The next moment Sister Sue was alone, laughing all by herself in the dark, in the vine-shaded corner of the veranda.

Promptly at seven the next evening Donald Kendall appeared with his violin and his music. And promptly at seven every evening for the next week he did likewise, to say nothing of several other times during the day when her pupils were not expected.

And when the week was over and he was gone, Sister Sue declared to herself that it was the happiest seven days she had known since she had come to Gilmoreville. To have lived again, even if for only one short week, in the atmosphere of music that was music, was something to hold dear to one's heart; something that would help to tide one over many a dreary day when music was only Johnny Smith's scales or Ruth Reynolds's five-finger exercises; something to think of and to live over and over again — in memory. And it would help through so many things.

Sister Sue was so glad afterwards that she had had that blessed week of joy, for it did help through so many, many things — and she had so sorely needed it, for if the winter had been a hard one, the summer that followed was even harder, though in quite a different way.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LURE OF A GOLDEN CURL

Mrs. Martin Kent's baby came early in October. It was a little girl. May named her "Martia." She said it was the nearest she could come to "Martin." They had wanted a boy. They had planned to call him after his father, and she *was* disappointed to have it turn out to be a girl, after all their plans.

May was really quite fretful about it. But that was nothing new. May had been fretful all summer. She had been sick and nervous and very difficult to please ever since she came, as Sister Sue found out. She had *wanted* all of Sister Sue's attention, but she had known that the pupils must come first. She did, however, grudge the attention Sister Sue bestowed upon their father. She said she did n't see why Sister Sue did it, either. She could have her father *all* the time, while she could have her, her only sister, and a poor, sick, ailing sister, at that, only these few short months this summer.

As for May's sharing any attention with her father, that was quite out of the question. She told Sister Sue that her father made her as nervous as a witch, and as for trying to be with him now she could n't, and she should n't. Not one of the least of Sister Sue's problems that summer, therefore, was to pay all of her spare attention to her father, and all of her spare attention to May, and at the same time always to keep the two separate and apart from one another.

It was not strange, then, perhaps, that it was a good big breath of relief that Sister Sue drew when, in November, Martin Kent came and took his wife and young daughter back to Boston.

Gordon had not come home at all from his Canadian motor trip, but had gone directly to college. He had needed money, of course, and Sister Sue had sent him a goodly sum. He had written her that she was a peach. Yes, she was! And he declared that he was going to make them all proud of him. He had said, too, that this year he was sure — he was very sure — that he could find that table-waiting to do — or something.

Sister Sue had answered back that it would help — a lot — of course, if he could find something of the sort to do, but that the main thing, after all, was that he should do well in his studies, graduate with honors, and then make something really worth while of his life; make them, indeed, proud of him. She said then something else, something that, if Gordon could have known, or if he had had the vision to understand, covered a big heartache between the lines.

"I *do* want *you* to succeed, dearie," she wrote. "Even May has given up her story-writing now, and you know what Sister Sue has come to."

This was in September.

In December, when Sister Sue and her father were again alone in the old house, came the unexpected from Gordon. Sister Sue had to read the letter twice before she got its full meaning. Then from the incoherent, rhapsodic tangle of blue eyes, golden hair,

moonlight, darlings, and sweethearts, she unraveled this information:

He was going to leave college. He had fallen in love. The dearest girl in all the world had promised to be his wife. She was the most beautiful creature Sister Sue had ever seen, with blue eyes and golden hair, and a voice that was like the voice of an angel — liquid purity and melted moonlight were rasping noises beside it. Her name was Miss Mabel Billings.

And now, as he had said in the first place, he should give up college. He would have to, of course. He would have to go to work to support his wife, of course. And already he had found a job, a splendid opening. Mabel's father was going to take him into the store (he kept a grocery-store — a big one right there in town). He was to have fifteen dollars a week at the start, with the promise of rapid advancement and a place in the firm later, all owing, of course, to the fact that he was to be the son-in-law of "the old man." Not every one in the store, of course, could have such a chance.

Twice Sister Sue read this letter; then, in the terror and dismay of the realization of its meaning, she sat down at once and answered it without planning in the least what to say. As a result the terror and dismay and absolute horror in her heart were all on the written sheets that were dispatched by return mail to the lovesick youth who had but a short twenty-four hours before poured out his heart to her.

Sister Sue had received his letter, but, oh, did he understand what he was doing? Did he realize what

it might mean to be tied all his life to a Billings who kept a grocery-store? And to be *in* the grocery-store, too! Was he sure he would like that? When he had had such dreams? And was he sure that the young woman would make him happy? Golden hair and melted moonlight were all very well, of course. But hair turned gray and moons did n't always shine. And, oh, was he sure, *sure*, SURE that this Mabel person was going to satisfy all his deeper feelings? Why! He was nothing but a boy! Not yet twenty-one. And to give up college now! And all his hopes and ambitions! Oh, he did not, she was sure he did not, realize in the least what he was doing.

By return mail, then, to Sister Sue came back his answer. And this letter she needed to read but once before getting its meaning — and realizing her mistake. It was short, cold, and not at all incoherent. It was also plainly grieved, and hurt, and angry.

Gordon had received her letter. He was sorry, he was sure, if he had displeased his sister Sue. But a man must marry to suit himself. She must realize that. He was aware, of course, that he was not yet twenty-one, but he had hoped to have her consent to his marriage. He proposed to earn his own living from now on, anyway. A grocery business might not suit persons with snobbish tastes, but it was eminently respectable, and suited him perfectly. As for Miss Billings and her satisfying his deeper feelings, his only doubt in regard to that matter was lest *he* be unworthy of *her*. And he begged to inform his sister Sue that he did emphatically understand

and realize what he was doing. She need not fear. He would see that they never annoyed her with their presence. If she would kindly send him, then, what few belongings he had in the house.

And he signed himself, "Very truly yours, Gordon Halstead Gilmore."

Sister Sue hastened to set aright her mistake. As if she were going to let *anything* come between her and Gordon! He might marry all the Billingses and grocery-stores in Christendom — he was still her brother and she *guessed* she was *not* going to send him "his belongings." Not trouble her with their presence! Indeed! As if she were going to let that boy marry a girl she did not know! She should have her up at once, of course, and get acquainted with her. And if Gordon still insisted on marrying her and she proved to be making him unhappy, surely then he would need his sister Sue! As if she were going to do anything to estrange that boy now!

And Sister Sue sat down and wrote her letter.

She said, nonsense, and that it was absurd, and that he took her altogether wrongly. It was her desire to have him make sure that he cared very much for Miss Billings before he took the irremediable step of marrying her. And she said that as long as he was so sure he did care for her very much, it was all right, and he had her congratulations and her best wishes. And, of course, she wanted to see and know her future sister-in-law, so would he not please bring her up to the old home for a real country Christmas and please stay a few days? If he would himself give her Miss

Billings's address she would write to the young lady herself.

And she signed herself, "Your affectionate Sister Sue."

But she shivered a little as she sealed the letter after reading it over twice to make sure there was nothing more she could add, and she did not breathe really freely till his reply was in her hands. She took a long breath then, for Gordon was very glad he had been mistaken in the tone of his sister Sue's other letter and he should be pleased to bring Miss Billings up for a real country Christmas, thank you, and he enclosed her address therewith.

In due time from Miss Billings herself came a violet-scented pink note, written with obvious care in forming each letter, saying that she would be pleased to accept Miss Gilmore's kind invitation to Christmas, and she was "Yours very respectfully, Miss Mabel Billings."

Sister Sue was somewhat prepared, therefore, to find her brother's fiancée just what she did find her to be, an exceedingly pretty, pleasant young girl, a little timid, anxious to please, but obviously quite unused to the sort of society Gordon had been accustomed to.

That evening, after the guest had retired to her room, Gordon told his sister Sue that she would find Mabel a child of nature and quite unspoiled by the world.

And Sister Sue said yes, she did appear to be that.

The Christmas visit was not so hopeless, after all. As the first shyness wore off, Miss Mabel was not so

awkward nor so distressed over her efforts to do things just properly. And she became more natural. Her really good qualities displayed themselves. She was sweet-tempered, kind-hearted, and sincerely anxious to be of service. And she was not coarse. Sister Sue, noting all this, told herself that, after all, time and good associations might soften the girl's defects, and certainly her virtues were of the sort that made for smoothness in running the machinery of daily living. That she was not inherently coarse would certainly make it easier for her to acquire the little niceties and refinements that Sister Sue feared Gordon would miss some day — if she did not acquire them. One thing was surely certain, they were very much in love with each other, and the fact that Gordon was willing to work, and work hard, in order to marry, might be not without a salutary effect, so far as character-building was concerned.

It was with an easier mind, therefore, than she had had when she greeted them, that Sister Sue said good-bye to the pair, though after they were gone and she was alone again with her father, her heart misgave her a little, and she drew a long sigh of regret for the high aspirations and ambitions for Gordon which she now knew she could no longer cherish, and all because of the lure of a golden curl and a sparkling eye. For whatever else the visit of Miss Mabel Billings had taught her, it had certainly convinced her that Gordon not only understood very well what he was doing, but was determined to do it. He had told Sister Sue the wedding would be in June.

CHAPTER XIX

A BROKEN ARM

THE winter passed and spring came again. The winter had been less severe this time, and particularly for Sister Sue it had not been so arduous. There were not so many shivering mornings with the fire out, nor quite so many frozen water-pipes. The family had been measurably well, and the pupils had been more regular in attendance. Expenses had not been so heavy and no checks had to be sent to Gordon. Indeed, Sister Sue wrote to May that she was making money, was growing rich, so rich that she was going to invest in a new spring suit.

When June came, bringing Gordon's wedding, she went into an even deeper extravagance and bought a brand-new pretty little frock for the occasion, "neither dyed, nor mended, nor turned inside out," she wrote May. But, what was still more thrilling to Sister Sue, she went to the wedding, venturing to leave her father to the Prestons' care for three brief days. It was the first time for four years that she had been away from home overnight, and she told May at the wedding that the smoke of the engine was like the perfume of Araby to her nostrils, and that even the railroad tracks looked good to her, which only made May stare and exclaim, "Why, how funny! I hate that cindery, sooty railroad smoke!" But then May had been away a good many nights during

the last four years. That might have made some difference.

It was a very pretty wedding. Most weddings are. It would be a sorry thing, indeed, that could take away all the beauty of a wedding: beauty with its charm of youth, lights, flowers, music, radiant faces, and holiday garments. Miss Mabel Billings, in her white satin and tulle, was a picture of loveliness, and her shy embarrassment rendered her all the more appealing. Gordon was a handsome and a beatifically happy-looking bridegroom. The guests represented the usual mixture of smiling, or teary-eyed, relatives, some rather noisy schoolmates on the lookout for a chance to play pranks, and a few intimate friends of the family. The father and mother of the bride, Sister Sue owned to herself, she genuinely liked. They were simple, kindly, and were possessed very evidently of a generous fund of good common sense. Sister Sue went home reflecting that, while keeping a grocery-store might not bring to Gordon a Ph.D. or even an A.B., yet, after all, grocery-stores occupied a place of no mean value in the scheme of daily living, and that it was just as necessary to have potatoes to peel as it was to peel them — sometimes.

May had told Sister Sue at the wedding that she should not be up to Gilmoreville till August this year. Then she and the baby and Martin would come for a few weeks. And again was Sister Sue conscious that her assent to the proposition would be merely an unnecessary formality — it had been a statement of fact, not a request for a favor. She

listened, therefore, with a quiet smile, while May went on to explain that the first month of their summer holiday was to be spent at the North Shore visiting friends.

It was soon after returning from the wedding that Sister Sue's daily paper carried the information that the great violinist, Donald Kendall, had gone down a twenty-foot embankment in an automobile. He had come out of the accident with multiple cuts and bruises and a badly broken right arm. It would be some time before he could play the violin again, the report said.

Two weeks later Sister Sue's telephone bell rang at nine o'clock one morning.

Sister Sue heard this, then, over the wire, spoken in Mrs. Kendall's voice:

"Is this Sister — er — is this Miss Gilmore?"

"Yes, Mrs. Kendall."

"Will — will you be so good, please, as to come right over? My son wants to see you." It was the fretful voice of a woman who has been harassed to the breaking point of temper and patience.

Sister Sue smiled.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Kendall, but I can't just now. I have a pupil."

"But, Sister Sue, can't you excuse her, or him, or whatever it is, for this once? My son has broken his arm, you know. Really, he's in a dreadful state."

"Yes, I know. I heard that he was injured and that he came home yesterday. I'm so sorry. How is he?"

"I've just told you, he's in a dreadful state." Mrs. Kendall's voice was waxing more and more impatient. "I can't do a thing with him, really, if you don't come. — Can't you dismiss that pupil this once? You're the only thing he's been willing at all to have. He has n't had a mouthful of breakfast."

Sister Sue's merry laugh went over the wire.

"And does he want me for breakfast, Mrs. Kendall?" she chuckled; then with quiet seriousness, she added: "Indeed, Mrs. Kendall, I'm very sorry, and I'll be glad to do anything I can. I have an hour from eleven till twelve and I'll run over then. I can't come before. Indeed, I can't. I'm sorry. But I'll be over soon after eleven."

"W-well, if that is the best you can do," accepted Mrs. Kendall grudgingly. "Er — thank you," she added, as an unwilling afterthought.

Sister Sue was still smiling as she turned away from the telephone, and for some reason the smile continued in her eyes if not on her lips all the rest of the morning.

Just after eleven she went through the garden gate and up the side walk to the Kendalls' veranda. Before she could ring the bell Mrs. Kendall met her at the door.

"Thank Heaven, you're here! I thought 't would never come eleven o'clock."

"Oh, yes, I'm here," smiled the girl. "But, Mrs. Kendall, what — what is it? What do you want me to do?"

Mrs. Kendall threw up her hands.

"Heaven knows, child! I don't! I don't believe even my son himself does. He 's restless, and — and, I'm afraid, irritable. He's always been perfectly well and strong, and he does n't know how to be sick. He is n't sick now."

"Is it more than just the broken arm?"

"Nothing serious. Only a few cuts and scratches. His head is still tied up — with plasters. But his arm — it was a bad break. The doctor says it will be weeks now before he can use it. He can't play, you know, and always before he's been able to vent his feelings on the violin — just as you do on the piano. — Your sister *said* you did." Mrs. Kendall smiled faintly.

"Yes, I know," smiled Sister Sue in her turn. "But, Mrs. Kendall, he *will* be all right, in time?"

"Oh, yes. If he does n't fret himself to death in the meantime, but —"

"*When* are you two women going to get done with your talking?" demanded an irate masculine voice from the library doorway down the hall. "How do you do, Miss Gilmore! I beg your pardon, of course, but Mother *said* you were coming to see *me*."

"Donald!" reprimanded Mrs. Kendall with a despairing "you see!" look toward the girl.

"And I am coming to see you," nodded Sister Sue, laughing a little as she came forward, "though I understand you are anything but pleasant company just now."

"Yes, I know I am a beast," admitted the man cheerfully. "Come into the music-room; I want you to play for me."

"*For* you!" Sister Sue bit her lips the minute the words were out. She had not meant to put it quite like that. But she had her fears for nothing. The man did not take it as she had thought he would.

"Yes. You take it out on the piano, don't you, when things go wrong?"

"Why, y-yes," laughed Sister Sue. "And when they go right, too."

"Humph!" grunted the man. "Well, I don't need that kind just now. But I do need the other. Now, sit down, please, and play."

"As *I* feel?"

"No! As *I* do," he snapped.

Her eyes began to twinkle, but he kept on speaking with no abatement of irritability. "I'm going to grumble and growl all I want to. I — I'll try not to swear. But I want to let it out for once — and as I talk, you play. Understand? And let me tell you right now you'll have to do some lively playing — if you're going to fitly express what I say."

Sister Sue laughed joyously and brought her hands together in a soft clap. More than anything else in the world, perhaps, Sister Sue loved to improvise.

"I can do it! I can do it! Oh, I know I can do it!" she cried, running to the piano and seating herself. "Ready. Begin!" she commanded, letting her hands rest lightly on the keys.

And he did begin, and he kept on. He roared — and scolded — and snapped — and snarled — and bitterly assailed a cruel Fate that had played him the beastly trick. The car, the road, the chauffeur, the

slipping mud, the steep embankment, the doctors, nurses, medicine, the smells and sights and sounds of the past three detestable weeks — they were all there. And in Sister Sue's playing they were all there, too. The louder he talked the louder she played; the faster flew his tongue the faster flew her fingers, until they were both in gales of laughter — and with a rippling run and a crashing chord Sister Sue brought the performance to a triumphant end.

"Well! *Have* you two gone crazy?" Mrs. Kendall stood in the doorway.

Her son drew a deep breath.

"No, but I was headed in that direction and Miss Gilmore saved me. I'm sane now — for a while, anyway. My! But that *felt good!*" he sighed satisfiedly.

"I'm glad, I'm sure, if I have been of any assistance," smiled Sister Sue demurely. Then, glancing at her watch, she got to her feet, saying: "I'll have to go now, I'm afraid."

"But you'll come again?" begged the man.

"Of course she'll come again, whenever you want her," spoke up the relieved mother before Sister Sue could answer.

"Oh, yes, I'll come again — when I have the time." Sister Sue was still smiling, though the emphasis of her amended sentence was unmistakable.

And she did come again. She came many times during the next month, and when the bandages and plasters ceased to decorate Donald Kendall's head and face, he crossed the yard to Sister Sue's garden gate and went to see her. They played checkers, chess,

and cribbage together. They read together, and not infrequently would Sister Sue sit again at the piano and let him vent his mind through her own fingertips. And when the arm was out of the sling and the violin could be held again in position and the bow drawn, it was Sister Sue who played the piano for that first song of rejoicing — triumphantly, yet very carefully played — over the now no longer silent bow.

It was August by that time, and Mr. and Mrs. Martin Kent and little Martia soon arrived. Donald Kendall did not come to the house after that, and the necessity for Sister Sue's going to his had long since passed, so now the two did n't see so much of each other. Before long, too, Donald Kendall left town. Mrs. Kendall, however, for a long time did not cease to talk of what a wonderful thing Sister Sue had been able to do for her son, and they did not know what they should have done without her.

It was just as well, though, perhaps, that Donald Kendall went when he did, so far as concerned any further benefit from Sister Sue's ministrations, for after the Kents came, Sister Sue had little time that she could call her own. Martia was a very exacting child. She "took" to Sister Sue at once, and May said she was so glad, for she herself needed a rest, and she could take a *real* rest, she declared, whenever Sister Sue had the baby, for then she did n't worry at all.

Late in August Gordon and his wife came up for a week, but May did not care for her new sister-in-law and showed it very plainly, which did not contribute

to the happiness of either guests or hostess. May was ironical and sarcastic and bored and sulky, and Gordon annoyed and angry. Poor little Mabel, obviously ignorant as to the cause of it all, chatted away cheerily to each one, saying how perfectly grand it was to be there all together and what a grand plan it was, anyway! Among them all, Sister Sue's tact and patience were tried to the utmost, and perhaps no one's sigh was quite so relieved a one as was hers when they all went home.

It was then that she suddenly realized how very lonesome she was, and how much she missed the visits of Donald Kendall.

"Oh, well! He was good fun, even if he was so outrageously conceited and irritable," she said to herself one day, her eyes idly following the little path through the garden to his side door.

She went upstairs then to sit with her father. John Gilmore had not been so well of late. Sister Sue wondered sometimes if it was the beginning of the end.

CHAPTER XX

MISTS, SUNSHINE, AND CLOUDS

It was the beginning, but the end was not yet. John Gilmore rallied from the sickness that had kept him in bed a week, and was so well by Christmas that when the letter came from Cousin Abby, Sister Sue wrote she might come.

Yes, Cousin Abby had written a very pitiful letter. She said she was sick, and had spent all her money trying to get well. She wished she could die *quickly*, but the doctors said it would probably be several months, maybe a year, before she did die, and here she was, still living on! Money all gone and not well enough now to earn any more! She asked, then, *could* she come to Gilmoreville? She could go, she supposed, to some charity home or hospital; but the thought was torture to her. At most she had but a few more months to live, and she *would* like to spend them among her own kin and die peacefully with some one of her own people to close her eyes. And Sister Sue was so good, so kind! Why, if she could be with Sister Sue she would n't mind the loss of home and money nor even the pain. *Could she come?* She would n't be any bother. It was her heart. It would just stop beating some day. There were pains at times, oh, awful pains. But she was not sick in bed and she could wait on herself. She *would* wait on herself if only Sister Sue would say, yes, she might come.

And Sister Sue had said yes. And Cousin Abby came. A faded, forlorn Cousin Abby, with graying hair and sad eyes, and none of the brisk alertness that used to "order the maids about and cut a dash with the motor car," as Gordon had once described her.

True to her promise, she was, indeed, not much trouble to care for (until toward the end, which came in August), but, inasmuch as she spent most of her waking hours in bemoaning her own sad fate, or the "terrible catastrophe that had befallen dear Cousin John and his family," her conversation was not only uncomfortable, but was exceedingly depressing, and Sister Sue oftentimes wondered how she could combat or even endure it.

When May learned of Cousin Abby's circumstances, the letter and its result, she promptly informed Sister Sue that, of course, she understood that this had made it utterly impossible for *her* to come to Gilmoreville this summer. That Cousin Abby always had been very distasteful to her, and that certainly now, with a sensitive child like Martia to consider, to go there was quite out of the question. They should go to the shore for the entire summer. That she hoped Sister Sue would understand their absence from Gilmoreville this summer was not any intentional slight to her father, but was occasioned entirely by Sister Sue's own selfishness in entertaining a guest that made other guests impossible.

Sister Sue gasped a little at the "selfishness," but beyond a pleasant note to May, regretting her deci-

sion to absent herself from Gilmoreville, she made no comment.

Gordon wrote that they, too, would not be up to Gilmoreville, though he did not give Cousin Abby's presence as the excuse. He wrote as the proud father of a new baby. He was afraid the journey would be quite unsafe for either his wife or his son.

Sister Sue, therefore, except for her father and Cousin Abby, was alone all through the summer, which was well, as it turned out, for the poor little invalid guest was a great sufferer the last two months of her life, and Sister Sue, with her pupils and all, had her hands quite full enough as it was.

In September, two weeks after the funeral, Donald Kendall came to his mother's home for a week's visit. He had been in town just ten minutes when he hurried over to his neighbors to tell Sister Sue that there was nothing the matter with his good right arm *this* time, and, indeed, there certainly did not seem to be, judging by the way he made use of it during the seven days he was there. From morning until night (and it would apparently have been from night until morning if Donald Kendall could have had his way) the two were playing every spare minute that Sister Sue could wring from her busy life. And when the week was over, Sister Sue declared to herself that that one week had fully compensated for the long summer of distress and discomfort, besides fortifying her for whatever the future had in store. It seemed so good to live with real music, once more, Sister Sue told herself. Nor did it occur to her that the player of

the music, the real music, had anything more to do with her rest and refreshment and joy than that he was merely the willing instrument through which the music poured.

It did occur to Granny Preston. After Donald Kendall had gone, she asked the question of Sister Sue: "If your father got better, really himself again, so ye could leave him all right, would ye go on, that is, I mean have ye given up all idea of ever goin' on an' bein' that concert player ye wanted ter be?"

Sister Sue's face instantly flamed into excited eagerness.

"Give it up? No, no! Indeed, no! If Father should get better, and if I was n't too old —! I'm only twenty-five now, you know! I could do it! I know I could! You should hear the nice things Mr. Kendall says about my playing. Oh, no, I have n't given it up — not yet!"

All of which only goes to prove that not even yet were those clamorous calls of "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!" quite silenced in Sister Sue's ears.

But Mrs. Preston only sent a sharp glance over her spectacles and grunted "Humph!"

Martin Kent's newest book came out in October. As usual, Sister Sue received an autographed copy from the author, and very promptly read it. As was usual, also, she wrote a note of congratulations and best wishes to her brother-in-law. The note this year had been a little harder than heretofore to write. Sister Sue worried a little over it after she dispatched

it. She *hoped* it had not shown the disappointment she had felt in the book. She had been growing more and more disappointed in them all, but this *latest* was quite the worst, she thought. He had named it "Blixie." It was obviously an imitation of his first and only success, "Trixie," and a weak one at that.

That her fears about her note were not groundless Sister Sue realized very soon, for a letter quickly came from May reading as follows:

You don't like "Blixie" [she began abruptly, after the salutation]; anybody could see that from your letter. Martin was real hurt. I *do* wish you could have kept it from him. I had an awful time with him. He was really very much troubled, coming as it did on top of all the rest. That is, you don't know it, perhaps, but I mean the criticisms on "Blixie"; they're horrid! Perfectly horrid! They say it's nothing but a very weak imitation of "Trixie" and that he's tried to duplicate that wonderful success and failed miserably.

Martin was feeling especially out of fix when your letter came, for he'd just been reading a criticism saying: "Martin Kent was evidently destined to be that deplorable but very common anomaly in the literary world, the author of one book no matter how many books may follow the single success." The mean things! I'm sure I don't know what they *do* want. It's all their own fault, anyway. They've never liked a single one of Martin's books since "Trixie." When he wrote "The Unknown Highway" they said it was nothing so good as "Trixie" and was unlike that wonderful little gem, and that the author would have done a great deal better to stick to the line of his original success. And they said the same sort of things about his other books. Well, now this year he tried to stick to the line of his original success. He tried to write a story like "Trixie." And now

what does he get? He's "copying," if you please! And doing it very poorly, too! It makes me sick! It's positively disgusting!

Besides, it's really serious, from the money point of view, I mean. None of his books have been much of a success except "Trixie," and Martin's preaching economy to me now all the time. He says we've *got* to economize. I tell him that I'll have to go trying my hand again at writing. I *did* get one story accepted, you know.

The letter closed then with a few words about Martia and about the weather. But there was a postscript, which said:

If you *can* think up anything nice to say about "Blixie" when you write, for Heaven's sake say it!

Sister Sue, however, could not think up anything apparently. At all events, she evidently forgot all about the postscript the next time she wrote.

As the winter came on, John Gilmore grew more feeble. He came less frequently downstairs now, spending much of his time sitting quietly in his room looking out upon his snow-covered garden. He did not seem to be suffering any pain and Sister Sue refused to think that he was really not so well.

"It is just that he can't get out of doors," she said to Mrs. Preston one day. "He'll be all right when spring comes and he can get to digging in his beloved garden again."

She said the same thing to Donald Kendall one day just after Christmas. (The violinist had come on to spend the holidays, ostensibly with his mother, though in reality he seemed to be spending them with

her neighbor, Sister Sue.) It was then that Donald Kendall, curiously enough, asked Sister Sue a similar question to that asked by Mrs. Preston not very long before:

"Miss Gilmore, have you quite given up all idea of a musical career? That is, if your father should get very much better so that he did not need you at all, would you take up your music again?"

He had asked the question diffidently, and Sister Sue smiled. He was thinking of that peremptory command of his that she go with him as his accompanist, of course! But she would show him most emphatically that *that* could n't be.

So she answered him very much as she had answered Mrs. Preston; and she let him understand that, yes, oh, yes, she assuredly should go on with her music.

"I should go straight to Signor Bartoni," she declared, "and I should ask him to put me in shape again, if 't was necessary, and then tell me where to go and what to do to train myself for a concert pianist."

She said more, very much more. Because she believed that Donald Kendall had sympathetic ears and would understand, she let him see deep into her heart, deeper than ever before, of what had been her hopes, her longings, her ambitions. And when she had finished and had turned back to the piano, flushed and trembling with the excitement of anticipation, Donald Kendall realized a little something of what those long years of sacrifice and waiting had meant to

this girl whose companionship he so craved. But to it all Donald Kendall made no answer. He ejaculated a short "Humph!" then he lifted his violin to position and began to play furiously the scherzo on the rack before him — playing it at almost double his usual tempo.

Donald Kendall had understood, but he had not sympathized. For Donald Kendall had seen the vision of Sister Sue, as the "great artiste," bowing her appreciation to the applauding multitudes, and he had heard again, more clearly than before, that clamorous call of "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!" and he was not pleased. It was not now for an accompanist on his concert tours that he wanted Sister Sue. He had found that out. He wanted her accompaniment, yes, he told himself bitterly, passionately, but it was her accompaniment to *all* his life, not merely to his violin. And if still she was cherishing hopes of pursuing that infernal career of hers, one —!

With a crashing cadence of staccato double-stopping he brought the scherzo to a sudden close and abruptly and very formally took his leave.

Once more it appeared that this wisp of a tantalizing bit of femininity was not going to give him what he wanted when he wanted it. And, like the spoiled child that he was, Donald Kendall went home and sulked. Lying awake in the night, however, he had decided that, even so, there was no reason why he should deprive himself of the pleasure of her pianoforte accompaniments whenever he could have them. So, as usual, in the morning he went over to her house

promptly at nine o'clock, though he had to content himself with the magazines on the living-room table for a full hour till the departure of Sister Sue's pupils gave her a short time of freedom to play for him.

The thought that he might as well enjoy these exceedingly satisfying accompaniments as long and as often as he could must have occurred again and yet again to Donald Kendall, for that winter he fell into the way of running up to Gilmoreville between engagements, on one or two days' visits, and in the month of May he thought he had found a whole week to stay.

But Donald Kendall did not stay the whole week. He stayed three days and then went away. And his going was very much like the running away of a man who had found his feet on the edge of an engulfing quicksand and felt the ground underneath him already slipping. Donald Kendall knew now that he could not go on indefinitely "enjoying" those accompaniments. He was beginning to love the player altogether too well to want to see her like this and be with her like this, and yet know that it would always be like this, nothing more, and not even this after she was free to live her own life.

And Donald Kendall believed that she would be free very soon now. He had seen John Gilmore many times during the winter and had watched him moving about and felt then that the feeble old gentleman could not live through till spring, surely not a month longer now. He learned, too, from his mother, that the general belief in the village was that the end was

near. When that end came the girl would be free to live her own life. In Donald Kendall's eyes was the vision of her as she had talked to him that December day, flushed, palpitating, and shining-eyed; and to his ears came again very distinctly the clamorous "Encore! Encore! Susanna Gilmore! Encore!" that her glowing words had evoked.

In December he had loved her and he had run away — for a night, because he loved her and could not have her for his own. He still loved her and he was going to run away again. This time for always — perhaps. He now loved her too well to ask her to give up her dreams of success for the sake of marrying him; and he loved her so well now that he did not dare remain and run the risk of sometime letting her see just how dear she was to him and how necessary she was to his happiness. Was he, after all her long years of waiting and self-sacrifices, going to bring to her dear eyes one shadow of regret or of disappointment, just as she saw the way opening wide before her to the long-looked-for goal? Never! Let her spread her wings and fly. Let her have her glorious flight out into the freedom, with the wide, wide world open before her, and without a thought of any one behind her who would be looking after her with longing eyes and outstretching arms. Let her go out unshackled and unhampered. Then, after she had tasted the sweets of fame and success and had found they were not sweet after all, and after she had come to feel wearied with the incessant bowing of her thanks and bored by the everlasting demand for encores, it might be then

that she would be glad to come into the circle of his arms and let him love and care for her all the rest of the days of her life. But now — now — he could not, *dare not*, remain another day, *not another day*.

And so on the evening of the third day he went through the side gate and up the garden walk with a very determined air — and he did not carry his violin. He had planned to stay as short a time as possible.

"I have come to say good-bye," he began in a particularly gay voice, as he ascended the steps.

"G-good-bye?" Sister Sue's voice was startled. "Why, I thought you were going to stay a week! And where is your violin?"

"That's it — I can't stay — and I did n't bring it. That's what I came over to tell you — I'm going away —" Rapidly talked the man and in the same particularly gay voice. "I'm going to-morrow morning — invitation" (which was true) — "week-end — to the Bentons' — down at the North Shore. They've just opened up their cottage."

"The — the Bentons — at the — North Shore —" Sister Sue echoed the names because evidently she knew not what else to say. Her eyes were puzzled, questioning.

"Yes, the Bentons," he nodded. Then, because he wanted to talk of anything but themselves and their own minds and feelings, he plunged at once into a somewhat voluble description of his host's family. "Nice people. Really a good sort, you know, in spite of their loads of money. There's a daughter Beth who sings, and a daughter Helen who paints — very

well, too. Then there are two boys, twins, in Harvard. There's always something doing at the Bentons', you may be sure."

"Yes I — I should think so," murmured Sister Sue.

"And — so I'm going to-morrow — yes, to-morrow morning."

He said more, quite a little more. He told of various experiences he had had in times past at the Bentons' cottage down at the North Shore, and he told what he imagined he would do this time. He rose to his feet then a little abruptly and, before Sister Sue quite realized what was happening, he was gone.

On the porch, alone, Sister Sue shivered as if with a sudden chill. Pulling her coat a little more closely about her, she waited a moment, then went into the house. She sat down at the piano after a while and began to play, and there was in her music a thread of questioning that seemed not to have found an answer even when the player rose from the piano a long half-hour later.

John Gilmore did not die that spring, nor in a month, nor yet in two months. He lived on through the summer and into the next winter. But he took to his bed in June and from that time he suffered in a way that made his days and nights a torture not only to him, but to his daughter Sue as well.

In July, May came up with Martin, but they stayed only a few days. May said she was much too sensitive to stand anything like *that*. Later, Gordon came

with Mabel and little Gordon, Jr. Mabel begged to be allowed to stay. She said she knew she could help Sister Sue a *little;* but Gordon insisted that she go back with him. He said that she was delicate and nervous and had not fully regained her strength from her operation in the spring. Besides, he said, the baby's crying might disturb their father, and anyhow he wanted them with *him.* So, reluctantly, Mabel went back with Gordon. Sister Sue was alone then with her father except for Delia in the kitchen. Both May and Gordon had suggested a nurse, and one had been hired for a time, but was soon dismissed. Her presence annoyed the sick man, and her ministrations seemed to make him worse rather than better. True to his habit for so long, John Gilmore wanted his daughter Sue — no one else. Fortunately he did not, through the summer, need very frequent attentions, so Sister Sue was still enabled to keep on with her pupils, much to her satisfaction and relief. She not only wanted the money, but she felt she must, at least a part of the time, have something else to think of and to do, something that would take her mind not only off her father's sufferings but also off herself.

Sister Sue was ashamed and dismayed. She admitted it to herself now. She was in love with a man who not only was supremely indifferent to herself, — of that she was very sure, — but very evidently was in love with another woman — a Beth who sang or a Helen who painted.

Sister Sue wondered sometimes just how long she really had been caring for Donald Kendall. She had

suspected it first at the time when he had gone away so suddenly that week in May and she had found how empty were those three last days of the week which she had expected would be so full. But she had put the thought out of her mind at once with an indignant "Absurd! Ridiculous! Why, the idea!" In spite of this, however, she found herself watching for his return and even asking Mrs. Kendall one day when her son was coming back. It was the answer, perhaps, that had really opened her eyes to that which she had before refused to see in her heart.

"Back here? Well, not at all, I'm afraid, this summer," said Mrs. Kendall. "He's gone now on a yachting cruise with the Bentons and I can't see, from the plans he tells me of, that he's leaving any time at all for Gilmoreville. A shabby way to treat his mother, I think, don't you?"

"Y-ye-yes, I do!" Sister Sue stammered, wondering if the sudden tightness that seemed to take her very breath *did* show in her face.

She got away then as soon as she could, appalled at the thing she now knew beyond all doubt; a conviction that no "absurd!" or "nonsense!" or "the very idea!" could silence.

She knew now why the days were so long and empty immediately after Donald Kendall had gone. She knew now why the past winter with its frequent visits from Donald Kendall had seemed so short. She knew now why the Beth who sang and the Helen who painted had always given her a vague uneasiness and the desire to banish them at once from her

thoughts. She knew now, too, something else. She knew that never, never, had she loved, really loved, Martin Kent. Last of all she knew, at least she was very sure she knew, that Donald Kendall did not love her. If he had loved her, would he have gone away in the middle of a week to a Beth who sang and a Helen who painted? And if he had loved her, would he not have come up at least once during all that long, long summer? Giving herself the only answers to these questions she thought possible as being true, it is no wonder, perhaps, that Sister Sue was ashamed and dismayed, and that she was glad of even a bungling scale played by Johnny Smith to get her mind off herself. And so the long summer passed and September came.

And September brought Donald Kendall.

Sister Sue knew that he was coming, but she did not know the time of his expected arrival. She hated herself because each day her feet would every little while take her to the window commanding a view of the Kendalls' front walk and because her ears each day would listen for the sound of a motor car coming up the street. At five o'clock one day he came, and at half-past seven he rang the Gilmores' doorbell. For fifteen uncomfortable minutes he sat stiffly erect on the old haircloth-covered sofa making polite inquiries as to the state of her own health and that of John Gilmore and talking of inconsequential nothings. Then he arose to go. And because he was so desperately afraid he would take her in his arms and tell her that he could not live without her, he rambled on

very gayly about his yachting cruise with the Bentons. And because Sister Sue was so desperately afraid she would show him how she longed to put her head on his shoulder and be petted and comforted, she gave little hard, short laughs and said she was so glad he'd had such a lovely time — and were the Bentons all well, especially the charming daughter who sang and the other one who painted?

Then they shook hands and the outer door banged. On one side of it Donald Kendall strode down the steps with a choking sound in his throat that might have passed for a cough. On the other side Sister Sue threw herself into the big chair with a sound in her throat that would never have been mistaken for anything in the world but what it was — a great, big sob.

It was that night that the real beginning of the end came with John Gilmore. He had a bad sinking spell, and when he came out of it he was feebler than ever in mind and body, though his sufferings seemed less. A nurse had to be sent for, and her coming disturbed him not at all. Yet he lingered, with the strangely tenacious hold on life that the frailest of invalids sometimes show, through October and November and into December, going peacefully to sleep at last just before the New Year.

CHAPTER XXI

THE REVOLT

Only Gordon came to the funeral. Mabel was sick at home and May telegraphed that neither Martin nor herself would be able to come, explaining by letter that Martia had too heavy a cold to risk going and that she could n't think of such a thing as going all by herself in the winter in all that snow. They sent a very beautiful wreath, however.

When it was all over and Gordon and Sister Sue sat alone in the living-room with the heavy scent of roses bringing back the scene of the morning, Gordon cleared his throat a little self-consciously.

"Well, Sister Sue, this will mean a change, of course, for you. You won't want to stay here alone, surely."

"No. Oh, no. I should n't want to stay here alone." Sister Sue repeated the words a little mechanically.

"Well, you know, of course, that our latchstring is always out. We'd be very glad to have you come to live with us."

"Thank you — but —"

"Oh, no 'buts' now. Don't go to feeling sensitive, my dear," interrupted Gordon, a trifle patronizingly. "You won't be a bit in the way, so don't feel that you'll be a burden. On the contrary, you'll be a real help, and you'll find plenty to do, I'll warrant, so

that you'll be paying for your board and keep all right," he laughed. "Grocery clerks with *my* pay can't afford maids, you know, and Mabel is so poorly, and has so much to do, what with the baby and all. Oh, you'll find plenty to do all right. Just remember that we'll be glad to have you, that's all — glad to have you. And now I must go if I'm going to catch that train," he finished, rising to his feet.

Sister Sue smiled faintly and thanked him for his invitation and said he was very kind. But not until after Gordon was in the train on his way home did he suddenly remember that Sister Sue had not told him whether she would accept his offer of a home or not.

Two days after the funeral came a letter from May. It was a very cordial letter, even a loving one. May wrote, she said, to assure her dear sister Sue that she would be most welcome to a home with them. And she said that Sister Sue need not worry at all about being under obligations nor feel as if she was accepting charity. That it would n't be so at all. They really needed her. She was such a splendid nurse that she would be a valuable addition to the family. And with the new baby coming in June her presence would be really a great comfort and help. Therefore, she need feel no hesitation on that score.

"So, now, come right along," she finished, signing herself as "Your affectionate and loving sister May."

For three days after this letter came, Sister Sue still went from room to room sorting, arranging, putting in order, doing the innumerable tasks that must always be done whenever one among us lays down

her work for the last time. On the fourth day she went into Mrs. Preston's kitchen, where the old lady sat by the window in the sun. Wearily Sister Sue dropped into a chair.

"Well, Mrs. Preston, I — I've decided," she began, flushing a little.

"About —"

"What to do. I'm — going. I've got to go, Mrs. Preston. You don't know, but all these days — since — since Father went — I've been fighting a battle."

"Yes, my dear." There was just enough but not too much interest in the voice of the little shrewd old lady.

"They want me. Gordon wants me, and May wants me. They say I need n't feel I'm a burden, nor that it's charity to give me a home."

The little old woman gave an indignant sniff, but Sister Sue went on without seeming to notice it.

" They say I can do enough, plenty enough, for my board and keep."

The old lady sniffed again, but Sister Sue still kept on unheeding.

"And it's true, I can do enough. I know I can. I'm really *needed* in both places, and that's the worst of it. I know I'm needed, but — I'm going to run away."

She paused, but only for breath.

"Mrs. Preston, I've got to run away. I know I'm a good cook and a good nurse and a good manager and a good seamstress, and I know I could help out a lot in either family. But I'm tired of helping out.

That sounds dreadful, I know. But it's the truth. *I'm tired of helping out!* The other day I read of a little girl who was asked what she was going to be when she grew up, and she answered, 'I'm going to be myself.' Mrs. Preston, that's what *I* want to be. I want to be myself. And I never have been. All my life I've been only Sister Sue. I now want the biggest apple and the biggest piece of cake, and I don't want to tie anybody's shoestrings but my own — for a while. Oh, I know that sounds selfish and horrid, and you don't know what I mean, anyway. But I can't help it. I *am* selfish and horrid to-day. Mrs. Preston, I'm nearly twenty-seven years old now. *Am* I selfish and horrid to want to be — be myself for a little while?"

"My land's sakes, child! *No!*" emphasized the old woman vigorously. "You're just right!"

"Thanks. That helps a lot," sighed the girl, "even if I do know it's not so. You see, I've made up my mind I'm not going to May's or Gordon's, though I'm going to Boston. I'm going to Signor Bartoni's and study again. I'm going to try to be what I've longed all my life to be — a concert pianist. You don't know, Mrs. Preston, how hungry I am for music, real music. And I'm going to hear, oh, such a lot of it when I get to Boston. And I'll teach, of course, after a while. I'll have to for the money. But I've got enough to start with, and there'll be a little more, I suppose, from the estate. Mr. Loring's attending to that, of course. And we're going to keep the old place in the family, Mrs. Preston, so don't worry about having to move."

"That's good; I'm glad," breathed the old woman fervently. "When are you going?"

"Next week. Monday morning. I'm going the first minute I can get away. I've got to have some things to wear, of course. I'll get some here, but I'll get more in Boston. *Boston!* Oh, Mrs. Preston, you don't know what just the sound of that word means to me!"

"Don't I?"

"You can't! Nobody can! And to think that I'm going just next Monday! And so I shall write to May and Gordon, but I shan't write till Saturday. I don't want to be here when they answer. I want to be already gone. I shall tell them to address me in Boston, care of Mr. Loring. I don't know where I'll be in Boston. I'm going first to Mr. Loring's, but I shan't stay there. I want to get away from here, anyway, as soon as I can. I see Father everywhere — in the awful way he's been the past few years. I'm hoping down to Boston to get my real Father back in my memory, the one I used to know. That's another reason why I'm in such a hurry to get there, *get there!*" she cried, rising to her feet and stretching out her arms in an abandonment of longing.

A moment later Mrs. Preston found herself alone.

Sister Sue wrote her letters on Saturday, and on Monday she left for Boston just as she had planned.

On Tuesday Mrs. Preston was confronted by a wild-eyed young woman and a scarcely less wild-eyed young man. Mrs. Martin Kent had evidently found the snow and the winter and the trip all alone

no obstruction whatever to her coming to Gilmoreville — this time. She and her brother had met at the station and had gone to the house together. Indignantly, then, they had accosted Mrs. Preston with the demand:

"Where is my sister?"

A sudden gleam leaped to the eyes of the little old lady, though at the same time a quiet smile came to her lips. For reasons of her own Mrs. Preston preferred not to antagonize the pair before her just yet. There were certain things that she wished to say to them before they left.

"Miss Gilmore? Why, she went to Boston just yesterday. What a pity, and you just missed her! Come in and sit down."

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted Mrs. May hurriedly, dropping herself into the offered chair with plain reluctance. "We knew she was going, but not so soon — We came up to — to stop her."

"Yes, to stop her," echoed the young man nervously, as he also took a seat.

"Stop her?" This time it was a question from the little old lady, and again the peculiar gleam leaped to her eyes.

"Yes, yes," answered two voices. And then the young woman added: "It was so absurd, her starting off like this all alone to Boston! Why, we wrote her to come to us — to *live* with us. We offered her a home. We both did."

"A home!" The word had caused the gleam to leap into flame now. "Yes, and what kind of a home

would it be?" demanded the little old woman, sitting suddenly erect. "What kind of a home would it be?"

Then, before either of the astonished and bewildered young people sitting there could speak, she went on to answer her own question. And right loyally she answered it. In emphatic, but very plainly-to-be-understood English she told just what kind of a home it would be, with Sister Sue at the beck and call of every one in it, with no life or will or wish of her own. She drew a picture of what Sister Sue's life had been thus far, and it was a very vivid picture.

Cleverly, from what she had heard and seen and known and guessed, she put together and built a very good mosaic of Sister Sue's daily living from the time her mother had died. And she pictured, too, the life Sister Sue had *wanted* to live, and so potent were her words that they themselves could see their sister Sue bowing her thanks to the applauding multitudes who acclaimed her the world's greatest pianist. This little old woman made them see then what Sister Sue had given up all these years, from the larger apple to the larger life, and how she had given it up for them. *They* had gone away to school, to camp, and to pay visits. *They* had married and left home. *They* had gone and come as they pleased. *She* had stayed. And now when the chance had come, and she had snatched at the years remaining to her, hoping still to be "herself" yet once before she died, what had they done?

"Here ye be — the both of ye," accused the old woman severely, "grudgin' her the few minutes she's

got left, an' teasin' her ter keep on bein' Sister Sue till the end of her days jest so's ye can keep on havin' that biggest apple ter the last."

Mrs. Martin Kent gave an inarticulate gasp; her brother said a short word under his breath. But that the irate little old woman had found a chord somewhere within them that vibrated to her appeal was evident, for chokingly then the young woman questioned:

"But what *are* we to do?"

"Do? Ye can go home. An' when yer sister Sue writes she has played a tune or seen a show or met somebody she used ter know, or done anything else she *wants* ter do, tell her ye're glad an' ye hope she'll do it ag'in, an' don't ye say one word about baby's croup or yer own cold or yer husband's terrible sore toe, or anything else that would make her imagine, maybe, she ought ter be there ter take care of it. Just let her be her own self for once an' tell her ye're glad she can be. An' ter-night, on yer knees, thank the good Lord that you've got a sister Sue.

"Oh! Ye ain't the only one. There's others, lots of 'em, right in this town, an' other towns, too, I s'pose. There's any amount of Sister Sues, always stayin' home themselves an' sendin' everybody else off; always givin' up what they want fer what somebody else don't want; always takin' a back seat so's everybody else can have the front; always stayin' in the kitchin an' peelin' pertaters for somebody else ter eat. Yer own Sister Sue said she was doin' that last herself; I heard her; so ye can see how *she* felt.

An' they ain't appreciated. They never be. Just 'cause they don't stand out in front an' wave a flag when the percession goes by, they ain't noticed. Ten ter one they're in the kitchin that minute fryin' doughnuts for that same percession ter eat when they git through marchin'. Though, when they git Over There, they'll be appreciated. What'll ye bet their crowns won't be so bright with stars it'll make one blind just ter look at 'em?

"Oh! I know I'm talkin' — I'm talkin' a lot. But I *feel* a lot, an' if I talked all night I could n't half finish tellin' ye what I *feel*. But I'm just tryin' ter tell ye that 't ain't always the folks that goes off an' writes books an' plays the fiddle an' sings in the opery that does the most good fer their towns. It's jest as apt — an' a little more so — ter be the Sister Sues that stay at home an' play in Sunday-School an' prayer-meetin's an' gittin' the boys an' girls together an' givin' 'em sings an' candy-pulls an' keeps 'em off the streets. But nobody ever pays ter see 'em or meets 'em with bands playin' at the railroad station. An' that's why I'm tryin' ter tell ye that I hope sometime you'll appreciate the Sister Sue you've got. There! I — I guess I've said enough."

Mrs. Martin Kent wiped her eyes openly. "I — I hope what you've said will — will do me some good," she stammered.

Gordon went over to the window and, looking out, muttered: "I've been a blamed idiot."

CHAPTER XXII

THE LIFE WORTH WHILE

All the way to Boston Sister Sue caught herself looking furtively over her shoulder. She could not get rid of the idea that she was running away, and that she would be followed and taken back home, like a naughty child. Before her eyes always was, not the letters from her brother and sister, but the fact behind the letters, that she could be and would be a real benefit to either family if she were to accept their offer — of a home. Already she had brought about a wondrous improvement in Gordon's wife; she knew that; and she knew, too, that there was a chance for her to do a great deal more by the quiet influence of her own presence. And as for real, practical aid in the way of housework and nursing, there was no limit to the service she might be in that line to both families. It needed no imagination to picture herself being, in their homes, a self-sacrificing, long-suffering Sister Sue for the rest of her days. Unfortunately, however, there was still another home she pictured, and in which, with distressingly growing frequency, she was picturing herself — *her own home;* her own home where it would really be this time "all for love and the world well lost." This picture, though, was one that always came unbidden, and which was, if possible, put to rout at once with a scornful: "For shame! And he dead in love with a

Beth who sings or a Helen who paints! And you knowing it all the time!" Determinedly, then, always Sister Sue would bring to mind that other picture, the picture which for so many years had been her star of promise — the picture of herself holding enthralled by the ends of her fingers the vast multitudes who had come to hear her play. And she told herself that now — now at last — she had her chance! And so she began to lay her plans. Plans in which there was no room for a Mabel who needed polishing, or a May who needed nursing, or yet a Donald Kendall who did not need loving — but was loved just the same.

Arrived in Boston, however, all pictures vanished. In Sister Sue's nostrils was the sooty smell of the engine smoke — to her a veritable perfume of Araby. In Sister Sue's eyes were the shifting throngs of moving people — to her a veritable kaleidoscope of charm and color. In Sister Sue's ears was the new yet ever familiar rush and roar of a great city — a veritable song of freedom to the long-restrained little woman who seemed to herself to be walking on air instead of on the somewhat dirty floor of a huge railroad station.

In the waiting-room she found Mr. Loring watching for her; and in the Lorings' beautiful home that night she slept the sleep of a tired child. For nearly a week she "just played and rested," as she termed it to Mrs. Loring. Begging to be left quite alone to her own devices, she foraged in the libraries and museums; fed her longing soul on concerts and plays;

and then she would go home to a good book, a box of chocolates, and a luxurious couch with the lights just right.

And so, rested, refreshed, and fairly tingling with the joy of living, she went to see Signor Bartoni.

He was busy with a pupil, said the trim little maid ushering her into the old, familiar reception-room. Would she please wait? It would not be for long. Sister Sue drew a long breath then — and sat down. She was glad to wait. Perhaps her heart would not beat so fast nor her hands tremble quite so much after ten minutes of quiet rest in the dear old room.

Slipping off her coat and gloves, she got her music in readiness. On top was the same Liszt concerto she had played for him that memorable day years before when he had set the match to the gunpowder of her ambition. Underneath was a Beethoven sonata, a lyric from Schumann, something from Chopin, and several romantic and emotional little classics she had played for him in those old days, winning from him his "Gr-rand!" "Splend-eed, Mees Gilmore!"

From behind the closed door leading to the rear drawing-room came the sound of a Chopin nocturne, played rather indifferently and with frequent interruptions in Signor Bartoni's high-pitched, staccato voice. It came to an end at last, and the door opened to admit Signor Bartoni and a very pretty young girl. He came forward at once with outstretched hands.

"Mees Gilmore! It *is* Mees Gilmore!" he ex-

claimed. "I am delighted, delighted!" He took both her hands in his, and beamed upon her with his little twinkling eyes.

Sister Sue laughed and blushed and drew in her breath with an ecstatic little catch. Like a cloak, then, the intervening years fell away and left her in her own eyes the girl of twenty.

"I have come, yes — to learn to be the great artiste," she breathed.

Briefly, then, she told of her past few years and of her chance now to be herself. "And so, may I play to you?" she finished.

He said: "Yes, yes. By all means!" There was a little time now, but not much before the next pupil. But he would take time. Hear her play? Indeed, he would! And he led the way to the rear room, closing the door after them.

"You see I — I want to know what — what to do," stammered Sister Sue, a little breathlessly as she arranged the music. "I want to know — whether you want me to stay with you — or go to some one else."

"I see, I see," nodded the man.

Then Sister Sue began to play. She played the scherzo from the concerto, a Liszt rhapsody, a little of Beethoven, a bit of Chopin, then she rose from the piano.

Signor Bartoni, watch in hand, had given a sudden exclamation:

"My pupil! It is past time! Look!" he cried. "But, listen. Can you wait? She is the last to-day.

One little half-hour and she will be gone. Then I talk to you. You'll wait?"

"Yes, oh, yes! I shan't mind waiting a bit!" cried Sister Sue, gathering up her music and hurrying toward the door.

In the outer room they found a young woman, and a very handsome, distinguished-looking older woman. Toward the latter Signor Bartoni rushed, with outstretched hands, even more excitedly than he had toward Sister Sue a short time before.

He turned then and presented Sister Sue, and, at the name, Sister Sue felt like pinching herself to make sure she was not asleep and dreaming, for it was the name borne by the greatest woman pianist the world knew.

"Now, wait, please, you two," begged the music-master. "I want to see you *both*. And I am glad. — You will be companee for each other." With that he vanished in the wake of his pupil.

Sister Sue found herself alone then with the GREAT ONE. In Sister Sue's mind she was just that — all capitals. Sister Sue had heard her play once — years ago. Since then the great pianist had been to Sister Sue the living embodiment of her own dreams. Hidden away in Sister Sue's desk was a little drawer containing pictures, magazine articles, newspaper clippings, anything and everything — that showed HER fame or mentioned HER name — that could be found. Over them Sister Sue had pored many times till she knew them all by heart. And to have before her now that wondrous being in the flesh, talk to her, hear

her talk —! Even now Sister Sue could not believe but what she had fallen asleep over her desk of treasures at home, and was dreaming.

She was very much awake, however. The lady herself began to talk. She spoke of Signor Bartoni, his fine skill as a teacher, and of her own long friendship for him. Then she spoke of the weather and the snow in the streets, the bad "going," of a new book, the latest play. Amiably she chatted on, of nothing in particular, her hands idly toying with a letter she held. A little breathlessly at intervals, and according to the demands of the conversation, Sister Sue would make polite responses, but when there came a pause she burst in, a little incoherently, and very much as if the words were being impelled by a hidden power that could not be controlled:

"I can't — I *can't* sit here and talk to you like this — and not tell you, or at least try to tell you, what you've been to me all these years!"

"'Been' to you, my dear?"

"Yes, yes! Oh, if I only *could* tell you! I heard you play once — years ago — and, oh, I loved it so!"

"Why, I — I thank you, I'm sure," answered the lady, with an uncertain smile, evidently a little nonplussed at this sixteen-year-old-hero-worship exuberance suddenly bursting from the lips of the heretofore quiet little woman before her.

"You see, *I — I loved* to play even then, and I had dreams — oh, yes, dreams. — But when I heard *you* — I *knew*. I knew just what I wanted to be. I wanted to be a concert pianist. I wanted to hold

people as you held them. I wanted to say things at the ends of my fingers as you said them. I wanted to sing to them with my fingers of the beautiful, beautiful world, as I saw it. And to think that — that now — *to-day* — I should see you and be able to talk to *you* — ! *You*, who have done so much — *you*, who have made your life, oh, *so wonderfully worth while!*"

Unexpectedly the great pianist turned with a sudden gesture.

"No, no! Don't say that — don't say that!" she cried. She was sitting erect in her chair, and speaking with curious passion. "You don't know — you don't understand. My life is n't the worth-while one. — It's the one there, right there in that letter, that's really worth while." She held up the letter she had been playing with — and tapped it with the forefinger of her other hand. Then, with a little laugh that yet ended in a sigh, she sat back in her chair, her eyes on Sister Sue's startled face. After a moment she went on speaking.

"You poor child! You don't know what to make of me, and no wonder. But what you said stirred me profoundly. I'd just been reading this letter. I received it at the hotel just as I started to come here, and while I was waiting for Signor Bartoni I opened it and read it. It's from a woman in a little town away up in Vermont. She was a schoolmate of mine. We used to talk and dream together of what we would be. I was all music — and wanted to become a great pianist. She had wonderful skill with the pencil and

paint-brush — and said she wanted to be a great artist some day."

"Yes, yes. I understand," nodded Sister Sue, her eyes shining.

"Well, what happened? Do you want to know? Do you really want to know?"

"Yes, oh, yes. Please!" begged Sister Sue.

"Very well, then. I will tell you. I went away and studied. I became what I am. My friend — my friend did not go away. Just as I left town my friend's mother fell and broke her hip and became a lifelong cripple. There were younger children — four of them. And there was not much money. The father was a poor sort, rather shiftless, and never could seem to get much ahead. So my friend (her name is Mary) stepped in and 'put her shoulder to the wheel' as she expressed it. She said she *had* to."

"Yes, yes, I know." Sister Sue nodded her head again. Her eyes were not shining now.

"Well! Mary cooked and swept and washed and ironed and mended, and waited on her crippled mother day in and day out, year in and year out. She had a lover, but she gave him up. She could n't leave home, she told him. Of course she gave up all thought of painting. To learn to be a great artist took talent, time, money, and the freedom to leave home. She had none of these but the talent, and that was only an aggravation — worse than nothing alone. And so that has been her life; always listening to other people's troubles — never telling her own; always carrying other people's burdens — never sharing

her own. Her mother died peacefully ten years ago. Her father a year later. Two sisters are married, and one brother has been sent through college; how, I don't know, but I'll warrant Mary does. She's 'Aunt' Mary now. Half a dozen nieces and nephews pour their troubles into her ears and find comfort. As I happen to know, her sisters and one brother depend utterly on her.

"And yet that woman, my friend Mary, in this letter here, has the presumption to tell me she's glad I've made my life so 'worth while' — that hers has been 'so barren.'"

She paused, but Sister Sue did not speak. The girl's eyes were turned away as if she were a little bewildered. After a moment the elder woman continued passionately:

"Barren! No woman is living a barren life who is needed by *some one.* My friend Mary's life was not 'barren.' Somebody *wanted* her, — somebody wanted her, every moment of the day. Is n't that worth *anything?* Nobody wants me, except when they want to be amused — perhaps. Why, Miss Gilmore! My friend Mary has made her life something 'worth while' twice over what mine is."

"You really believe — that?" Sister Sue turned now as she asked the question — a dawning something in her eyes that was quite new.

"Of course I mean it! Why, child! Look at what she has done! A crippled mother loved and cared for till the end. A father saved from drink — and I happen to know he was saved. A family of harum-scarum

boys and girls kept together and reared to be honest, self-respecting members of society; and now their children being helped into the same path. A work done that nobody else in the world could have done under the circumstances. True! She did n't paint the pictures she had wanted to paint. But the pictures she did paint are living pictures — not dead canvases hung upon a wall for critics to wrangle and squabble over about perspectives and colorings and technique! And, perhaps you 'll say it was a sacrifice, but I would prefer the word *opportunity* — in this case."

"Opportunity?" Sister Sue's doubtful repetition of the word made it a question.

"Yes. Opportunity to make her life really 'worth while,'" emphasized the lady with a meaning smile. "Of course, if there had been no crippled mother, or weak-kneed father, or harum-scarum children who needed her, why, then let her paint her pictures. But when she calls *her* life 'barren' — well, I'm going to write to my friend Mary and see if I can convince her of her blindness of being *needed!*"

"Needed — *needed!*" Sister Sue echoed the words just above her breath.

"The very greatest blessing there is, as we who are not needed know only too well. If some one needs you, you are happy, indeed. But I am not needed — now. Once I had duties, but I left them for the prize of greatness, and the prize of greatness has burned to ashes in my hands." And the great pianist bowed her head in her hands and sobbed.

"*Needed!*" It was the triumphant cry of one who has made a sudden joyous decision. Sister Sue was on her feet, her face alight.

"Will you — would you — please tell Signor Bartoni that — that I suddenly found I must change my plans? Tell him I will write and explain. I — I don't want to talk to him just now. — Please?" And Sister Sue was gone.

Ten minutes later the music-master came out from the inner room with his pupil.

"Mees — Gilmore? She has gone?" He questioned in surprise as he turned back into the room after bowing his pupil through the outer door.

"Yes. She left a message for you. She said to tell you that suddenly she found she must change her plans. She will write and explain. She did n't want to stop to talk now."

"Good!" The Signor threw up both hands and spoke with surprising vehemence. "I did not want to talk — also! I am glad she is gone! I have been dreading all thees time to come back — into thees room —to see her."

With a gesture of despair he rolled his eyes heavenward. Then, at his visitor's obvious look of amazement, he shrugged his shoulders and explained.

"You are surprised. I spoke plain — too plain, maybe. But I was much distressed. Mees Gilmore — she play beautifully — once, but not now. Her touch — her fire — her poise, all gone. She has been too tired — too busy to practice — all these years, five, six — yes, six — I think it is. Her father's busi-

ness — it — what do you call it — went smash. And his brain — that went smash, too, but all these years he lives. He lives — and Mees Gilmore — she do everything — cook, nurse, teach music, take care of everything, everybody. — Of course she could *not* practice — that could not be expected. But to-day — she comes. Her father is dead, her family married. She is free — and she thinks again to step right in, where she was years ago, and become now the great arteest — as she could once have been."

"Oh —!" breathed the lady, a great light of understanding on her face. "I think I begin to see."

"So — she comes and plays to me. And I — I cannot tell her the truth — Not with her shining eyes begging me, beseeching me — But it would be a pitee and a cr-rime to let her go on and on, thinking one day she will arrive — She will never arrive now — It is too late. But I cannot tell her — I cannot."

"You won't have to," smiled the woman who had told Sister Sue that the greatest blessing in all the world was to be *needed* by some one. "You won't have to; I'm sure you won't. She will write to you, and she will tell you that she has changed her mind. She does not *want* to be the great pianist."

"Thank Heaven! Let us hope you speak the truth," breathed the music-master fervently.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE OPPORTUNITY

The Lorings were very much astonished to have Sister Sue tell them she was going back to Gilmoreville right away. They were more astonished when she told them that she had decided, after all, not to go on with her music just at present.

Mr. Loring only smiled and said a polite something that meant nothing, and let the matter pass. But Mrs. Loring was not so easily satisfied. She seized the first opportunity, when they were alone together, to induce the girl to tell her more about it.

"Did that horrid man say bad things to you?" she began.

"Why, no indeed! Not a thing," laughed Sister Sue.

"But you played to him?"

"Yes, oh, yes. And he was perfectly lovely to me and seemed *so* interested! But another pupil had already come and so he asked me to wait till after she had gone. Then he would talk to me. But I did n't wait."

"You did n't wait?"

"Not till he came out, no. I — I got to thinking. May is going to need me very much this summer. And Gordon, too, really needs me. I think I 'll go to them."

"And keep on sacrificing yourself! Oh, yes, of course!" commented Mrs. Loring with rising indignation.

Sister Sue laughed again. Then suddenly her eyes grew luminous. A deeper color came to her face.

"Somebody once, that I heard, called it *opportunity*, not sacrifice. Don't you think it would be lovely if we could think of it like that, Mrs. Loring?" she asked, a little shyly.

"'Opportunity'! Humph!" fumed Mrs. Loring, although plainly softening against her will. "Well, you've found your 'opportunity,' all right!"

Sister Sue only smiled and shook her head. But there was still in her eyes the wondrous glow as she hurried away to do her packing.

Just as Sister Sue was leaving the house the next morning the mail came and there were two letters for her. One from May — the other from Gordon. Slipping them unopened into her bag, she left them to be read when she should get all established in her seat on the train. But though unread they were not forgotten. All the way to the station they lay, as if lead, in her bag and on her mind.

"If only they had n't come *to-day!*" she sighed to herself. "Oh, I hate so to read them *to-day*, when — after all — I'm going back — to them."

She knew what was in them, of course. They were the first letters she had received since she had written her brother and sister declining to accept a home with them, and telling them she was going to Boston to take up her long-neglected music again. She could imagine just about what each would say.

Gordon's letter would be short and crisp and cutting. His opinion would be expressed energetically,

and when she had read his letter there would be no doubt in her mind as to his opinion of her and her "crazy notion" as she knew he would call it. There would, too, probably be a caustic statement to the effect that of course *that* would n't count with her any more than they themselves, or their wishes, counted, or the fact that they had offered her a home with them — the best they had. This would be Gordon's letter.

May's letter would be longer. It would tell of Martin's continued ill-luck with "Blixie," and of Martia's fretfulness and exactingness. It would tell of her own ill feelings and despondency and of the extra amount of hard work she had to do now that they had moved out of the city, when really by good rights she should be in bed with a nurse to wait upon her. At the end, perhaps as a P.S., she would say, plaintively, that she was sure she hoped Sister Sue would have a pleasant time enjoying herself in Boston — if she *could* enjoy herself when all the time she would know that her only sister was simply pining away for the want of the strength and comfort and courage that her dear Sister Sue's presence would give her. This would be May's letter. And Sister Sue wanted to read it only a degree less than she wanted to read Gordon's.

"If only they had n't come *to-day!*" she sighed again and again to herself. "If only I could have written to *them* that I *was* going to them, first to one, then to the other, before their letters to *me* came — scolding and complaining and blaming me — it would have been easier. But now —"

Steeling herself for the inevitable, however, Sister

Sue resolutely took the letters from her bag. Holding them in her hands, she hesitated. Should she read Gordon's, or May's, first? Did she prefer to be smartly slapped, or to be pricked with countless little pin-thrusts first? After all, a slap was benumbing — in a way. It might dull the hurt of the pricks, she reflected, as with a little shrug she dropped May's letter back into the bag and slipped a hatpin under the flap of the other envelope.

With a resigned sigh she took out the letter and began to read, but, at the first line after the salutation, she suddenly stiffened into astonished attention.

DEAR SIS: [ran the letter.] Bully for you! I say. Go in and win! And here's the best of luck to you! Telegraph me the date of your first concert and I'll be there and blister my hands with the biggest clap the old hall (wherever it is) ever heard. And, while I'm about it, just let me say that I don't know of any one who deserves success more than you. I'm not much on letter-writing, Sis, and I can't sling ink like my esteemed brother-in-law, but I wish I did know how to say how much I appreciate all you've done for us all these years — taking care of Father; taking care of May and me; taking care of the home; taking care of everything and anything but yourself. But I don't know how, so there's no use trying, I suppose. But for once I wish I could sling ink like Martin, then I'd make you see how I feel. However, here's where I hope you get your innings, Sister Sue! And I hope you make a home run! In all of which Mabel joins me — only she says she does n't know what a home run is. And, by the way, Mabel says she wishes she could thank you, too, for all you've done for her, which, she says, is a whole lot and a great deal more than you'll ever know.

Your affectionate brother GORDON

"Why! Bless the dear boy's heart!" breathed Sister Sue, trying to blink off the tears before her fellow-travelers saw them. "And when I was thinking — I almost wish now I'd saved him till the last."

Still blinking and trying to swallow the lump in her throat, Sister Sue put Gordon's letter back into her bag and took out her sister May's. Again as she began to read did she stiffen into astonished attention.

My dear Sister: [May had written.] Your letter telling us your plans came duly to hand, and you don't know how glad I am that you are going to Boston to take up your beloved music again. And you will succeed; I know you will succeed. And we shall all be so proud of you!

And I am so glad that after all these years your chance has come at last. I am afraid you have thought sometimes it never would come, you poor dear. And I am afraid you have thought sometimes we were pretty selfish and thoughtless, to let you take all the burden and care off our shoulders, for that's exactly what you *have* done all these years, dear Sister. I am afraid you sometimes thought, too, that we did n't appreciate it; and I know we have n't half appreciated what you have done for us all that time. As I think of it now, and look back on it, I am ashamed to think how little I have realized what a lot you were giving up for us all the time. But now that you are really going and are to take up your own work, I guess we shall begin to know and understand and appreciate, all right! You know you never miss the water till the well runs dry, and I suppose we never should have known what a big place Sister Sue filled in our lives if she just had n't walked out and left the big gaping hole! But we shall know it now, all right! And I was thinking only the other day, why! just what you did for Father was wonderful! To say nothing of all the watchful care you had of us! And I do hope that now you can get a little reward. And you *will* get it in your

music. And to think I had the face to ask you to come and live with me, and keep right on doing for us, when all the time you had only just been waiting for a little freedom to go and live your own life as you wanted to! But I shan't again — I'll promise. And I am just as glad as glad can be that you are going to Boston and to your beloved music again. Now write and tell me all about it — and everything you are doing — we shall be so interested. And after you get all fixed I'll want to run into the city and see how you look. And we wish you the best of success now and always. Don't worry about us — don't worry a bit. Just enjoy yourself for once — if you can!

Always your loving sister

MAY

"Why! what — what *can* have happened to them both?" thought Sister Sue as, with excited fingers, she dropped May's letter into the bag with Gordon's. "What can have happened to them?" She was still trying to blink away the tears, but her eyes behind the tears were now shining with a light never in them before.

It was on that same afternoon that Donald Kendall, in Gilmoreville, sharply rang the Gilmores' front-door bell. A moment later he stepped into the still hall in response to Mrs. Preston's invitation.

"Come right back into my room, please, Mr. Kendall," she directed him. "There ain't none of this part of the house open, ye know."

"Miss Gilmore is away, I take it, then," said the man as he sat down, with obvious impatience, in the chair Mrs. Preston offered him.

"Yes, sir."

"When did she go? — if I may ask," the latter words added as a somewhat ungracious afterthought.

"Why, just last week, Mr. Kendall. Monday, I think." Into the old lady's eyes had crept a curious twinkle, not at all the sort of look one would have expected in response to the unmistakable irritability of the questioner.

"When is she coming back?" (There was not even the ungracious afterthought this time.)

The old lady hesitated. Then, as if weighing each word, she said slowly:

"Well, she did n't say — when she left — except that 't would be quite a while, probably. Ye know she went down to Boston, to do her music again."

"No. I did n't know," snapped the man.

Once again into the old lady's eyes crept the curious twinkle, but her voice was still quiet, noncommittal.

"Well, she did. Oh, they offered her a home with them, her brother and sister —"

"*Did* they?" cut in the man sarcastically.

"Yes." The old lady was not looking at him now. She was carefully smoothing out a wrinkle across her knee. "They were very kind. They said that she need n't feel beholden to 'em at all or call it charity, that she could do enough for her board an' keep."

"Charity! Board and keep! Good Heavens!" exploded the man.

"Yes, sir." Mrs. Preston's eyes were still on the wrinkle she was smoothing. "But, as I said, she

did n't go to them. She went to Boston to do her music."

"Can you blame her?"

"N-no. Perhaps not. Still, if 't was ter marry, now, an' go into a home of her own —" She let her sentence hang unfinished in the air.

"Miss Gilmore is not the marrying kind." The words were uttered in a voice that was a cross between a growl and a groan.

"How do ye know?"

"Wh-what?" The man turned sharply. But the little old lady met his eyes with serene unconcern. "Why, I — I don't know."

"I thought as much."

Again the man threw a sharp glance into the old lady's face — and again the little old lady met the glance with serene unconcern. The man jerked himself about in his chair.

"But I'm sure of it," he frowned. "I know that she has wanted to go on with her music — in Boston. Look at her now. That's where she's gone, is n't it?"

"Yes. She — went."

"Well! There's the proof for you. Miss Gilmore does not wish to marry."

"Did ye ever ask her?"

"Did I —" The man stopped, and got to his feet abruptly, his face dark with anger. But the little old lady was still smiling straight into his eyes.

"Well, why don't ye?" she queried imperturbably. Then, before he could carry out his very evident intention of leaving the room, she said with a brisk

change of manner: "Come, come, Donald Kendall. Come back and sit down. I've got something ter say ter you — something ye want ter hear, too."

At the door the man paused irresolutely, his hand on the knob.

"Come, come!" reiterated the little old lady. "Ye don't mind an old woman like me, an old woman that fed ye cookies when ye was six — little cookies with seeds in 'em. An' ye *did* like them cookies, Donald Kendall! Now, come back an' sit down."

With a short laugh and a gesture of angry resignation, the man turned and came back to his chair.

"Mrs. Preston, you are incorrigible. I don't know why, I am sure, that I come back or why I have listened to you even as long as I have. I've been on the point of leaving a dozen times in the last five minutes," he finished crossly.

"*I* know why ye come back," nodded the little old lady, her shrewd eyes on his face; "ye ain't the big man now — the big fiddler that everybody claps — an' yells at. Ye're jes' the little boy I used ter know, an' ye're hopin' I've got another cooky for ye, an' — well, I have."

"What do you mean?"

"Donald Kendall, seein' as ye do love her, why don't ye ask her ter marry ye? Oh, now, don't bristle up," she smoothed him hurriedly, as he started to rise to his feet; "ye ain't goin' ter mind an old woman like me."

He fell back in his chair and turned his head away.

"How do you know I — I love her?" he asked in a muffled voice.

"My sakes! How do I know ye've got a nose on your face or hair on your head. As if a man could spend *every* minute he had over here playin' with a pretty girl an' not love her!"

"We were — were practicing, Mrs. Preston." He spoke with cold dignity.

"Sure ye were! I've seen that kind of practicin' before."

The man shrugged his shoulders irritably.

"Well! Well, suppose — I do," he snapped. "What, then? She has gone to Boston, has n't she? My proof still holds good! As I happen to know, Miss Gilmore's one great desire in life for many years has been to go on with her music. Well — she is now going on with it. What more proof do you want?"

With a low chuckle the little old lady thrust her hand into the pocket of her apron.

"I think maybe ye'd like — the cooky — now," she said, taking out a yellow envelope and handing it to him.

"Why — what —"

"Read it. It jes' came this noon."

A minute later he looked up with puzzled eyes.

"From Miss Gilmore. But she says — she is coming back," he stammered.

"This afternoon. Yes."

"But why?"

With a funny little shrug the old lady threw him a sidelong glance.

"She did n't say. An' I don't say — either. *I* don't know. But if I was a great big six-foot man, right here on the spot an' wanted ter find out, I'd — *find out.*"

With a hearty laugh the man sprang quickly to his feet. His face had cleared. He looked suddenly alert — happy — sure of himself.

"Granny Preston, you're a wonder! I *will* find out! You need n't tell her, but — I'll be over this evening to — to 'practice.'"

"That's the talk! It'll be all warm in there — in her room. My husband's goin' ter start the furnace right away. Good-bye, an' good luck ter ye."

"Thanks!" The man closed the door behind him. Then he opened it again to poke in his head boyishly.

"Oh — I say! I'm much obliged, Granny Preston, for the — cooky," he laughed. Then the door snapped shut.

At six o'clock Sister Sue arrived. Leaping flames in the big old fireplace of the living-room gave her a welcome no less cordial than the one Mrs. Preston bestowed upon her. And the biscuits and maple syrup rounded out a supper that made Sister Sue quite forget the long, cold ride up from Boston.

Mrs. Preston asked no questions, nor did she even have much to say when, after supper, Sister Sue commenced — a little diffidently:

"You see, I — I've changed my plans, Mrs. Preston. I — I am going to live with May, and Gordon, whichever one needs me the most — *needs* me, you know. I had two beautiful letters from them to-day."

"Yes, yes. Well, is that so?" murmured Mrs. Preston, who had been keeping a nervous eye on the clock for ten minutes past. "Well, I'm glad, if they wrote ye nice letters, I'm sure. But never mind that, now. Ye can tell me all about it to-morrow. You jes' go inter the sittin'-room an' rest, an' — My land! If there ain't the bell this minute. Now, *who* do you s'pose that *can* be?" she dissembled as she hurried into the front hall.

In the living-room, a minute later, Sister Sue was greeting Mr. Donald Kendall.

"Why, Mr. Kendall! *You?*" she cried.

And Mrs. Preston, catching a delighted glimpse of the quick color that flew to the girl's face, took herself out of the room with swift steps and a joyous chuckling all to herself.

"Yes. I came on for a couple of days' stay," said the man as the door closed behind Mrs. Preston. "I heard this afternoon you were to be here to-night, so I came over. You don't — mind? I did n't bring my violin — I feared you'd be too tired to play."

"I'm glad to see you," said Sister Sue. And because it seemed as if he must hear the quick beating of her heart, and read aright what she felt was a telltale color in her cheeks, she began to talk very fast of what he had been doing.

They spoke then of her father. And Donald Kendall said a few low words of sympathy, of his understanding of what all those years had meant to her and to her father. And, as he talked, it seemed to Sister Sue that it was a new Donald Kendall —

a different Donald Kendall — there before her; a Donald Kendall with all the old charm, but with a softened, chastened something about him that doubled that charm and quite did away with his old imperious, disagreeable manner. She caught herself wondering if it were the Beth who sang or the Helen who painted that had brought about this wondrous change. Then, as she was wondering, she suddenly became aware of his asking her a question.

"But yourself. You have told me nothing of your own plans. You are—are you going back to Boston?"

She shook her head. There was a moment's hesitation, then she spoke.

"No. You remember — perhaps you do not remember — but I — I told you, once, that sometime I was going back to my music, if I could, and — and study for the concert stage."

"Yes, I remember." He had turned away his face. His voice sounded a little harsh.

"Well, I — after Father went and I was alone — I thought the time had come, and — I decided to go. I went to Boston. I even went so far as to play to Signor Bartoni."

"Yes."

"Then something — never mind what — made me change my mind, and — I came home."

He turned toward her quickly, his face alight.

"You mean — that you have given up all idea of going on with your music?" he demanded eagerly.

"Yes, and —"

"You mean that? You *know* you mean it?" he cut in eagerly.

"Why, yes. Yes, I do," she repeated, her startled eyes questioning him a little.

"Thank Heaven, then!" he breathed fervently. "That frees me. I can ask you now for myself. I can plead with you to come with me —"

But she stopped him with her hand upraised. She had grown very white.

"No, no. Please! Don't ask me. You don't understand. I am going to live with Gordon and May. That is why I came back, Mr. Kendall. They need me — so much."

"*They* need you! Well, how about *my* needing you?" It was unmistakably the old Donald Kendall who said this. The imperious, not-in-the-habit-of-being-denied Donald Kendall. So much so that Sister Sue, even perturbed and distressed as she was, caught herself thinking that, after all, the Beth who sang or the Helen who painted had not made so thorough a job of it.

"Oh, no! No! No! I could n't go with you!" she cried shudderingly.

In Sister Sue's distracted vision was a picture of herself, trailing from place to place, playing accompaniments for this man, who would, of course by that time, be married to a Beth who sang or a Helen who painted. To Sister Sue it was a bitter, cruel picture, unendurable even to think of, and her terror at it showed unmistakably in her face and voice as she repeated quiveringly:

"I could n't go with you, Mr. Kendall. Oh, I could n't."

Before the abject horror in her face the man fell back dismayed. His own face grew white.

"But if I could make you see what it means to me — I would wait — I'd be willing to wait — if you thought — that only sometime —" His voice broke and he fell silent.

"But — but it could n't be — *ever*," she faltered with dry lips. "I don't seem to have made you understand. I have given up my music — as a public profession, I mean. I could n't play for you, and —"

"*Play for me!*" He had been walking up and down the room. He wheeled now and faced her — his face a blank of incomprehension. Then suddenly his countenance changed as with a flood of light. "For Heaven's sake, girl! What do you think I've been asking you to do?" he demanded.

It was Sister Sue's turn to fall back, her face showing almost consternation.

"Why, to — to play your accompaniments on your concert tours, as you asked me to before," she stammered. "Was n't that what you meant?"

"Well, no, it was n't." A curious mixture of emotions was struggling for expression on the man's face. Relief, doubt, hope, fear; they were all there. "*I was trying to ask you to be — my wife.*"

"Wife? Why, I — I thought the Beth who sang or the Helen who —" At the sudden flame of a joyous something that flashed into his face she stopped short

and turned quite away. She had suddenly realized what her words must have implied.

He was at her side instantly. "As if all the Beths or Helens that ever grew could be compared for one minute with *you!* Why, dear, I've wanted you — it seems now as if I'd wanted you always — not to play for me, though you will play for me sometimes, I know, but to be with me always. I need you, I —"

At the word *need* she turned — at the same time drawing away a little.

"No, no. Oh, I forgot. How could I have forgotten? I am going to May and Gordon. *They* need me. That is why I came back — to —"

But he would n't let her finish. He laughed, he stormed, he pleaded. He was masterful and beseeching by turns. He told her of the long, long months when he had kept away from her because he loved her too well to be with her and still know that he could not have her. He told her how he had made up his mind that never, never would he stand in the way of her accomplishing her dreamed-of career — if the chance ever came to her. And when her father died and the chance did come, he told her he thought he was then going to be brave and stay away.

"But I could n't stay away," he declared. "I could n't. I *had* to come. I was in torture. All day I thought of you, and all night I dreamed of you. From away out West I turned my face toward the east — to Vermont where you were, dear. Right and left I canceled my engagements. I had to know whether or not you were going to take up your music.

"Then to-day, when I came, I found you — gone. Little girl, if you could have seen my heart at that moment — the blackness of despair. I knew then how much I had *hoped* from my journey."

"But you must have found right away that I was coming — to-night."

"I did. And right away I was in the Seventh Heaven of *hope* again. Surely, darling, after all that, you're going to give me — my reward?"

"But — what can I do about Gordon and May?"

He drew himself up into stern uncompromisingness.

"Now, look here, 'Sister Sue' — yes, I am calling you that on purpose; it's a dear name, and you'll be 'Sister Sue' to all of us as long as you live — you have given that blessed brother and sister of yours just — er — just twenty-five years of your life. That's May's age, if I mistake not. And that's enough. It is time you gave more thought to — I was going to say to — yourself, but of course you won't do that —Sister Sues *never* think of themselves — so I will say it is time you sacrificed for *me* for a while. Let *me* have what *I* want, and *I* want — *you*."

Sister Sue's eyes were luminous. An adorable color stole to her cheeks.

"Oh, just *that* would n't be any sacrifice! That is — I mean —" she began to correct herself hastily. But it was too late. With one triumphant sweep he had her in his arms.

Later — some time later — when, a little breathlessly, she was smoothing back her ruffled hair and rearranging her rumpled collar, she said:

"Of course, it is n't as if — as if Gordon and May would n't be — be — Well, I had some beautiful letters from them just to-day about their wanting me to be happy — in my own way."

Donald Kendall sniffed his disdain with the superiority of one who looked down from the height of a goal attained.

"Oh, no doubt. I understand and fully appreciate the kind solicitude of Brother Gordon and Sister May. But all the same, whether they permit or not, I want them and you to understand that, from now henceforth and forevermore, you are going to be *my* 'Sister Sue.'" Then, with a low, tender laugh, he breathed: "'*Sister*' Sue is no more, but now," as he drew her into his arms, "my *wife*, Sue."

THE END

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